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["JACK! JACK! IS IT TRUE?" NAN CRIED, SPRINGING TO HIS SIDE.]

A SAD MISTAKE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

THERE is not the smallest doubt that had the *élite* of Torchester been consulted, they would have said that the "mistake" was Jack Horton's marrying at all, for he was a lieutenant in a very aristocratic regiment, which required considerable management for its officers to keep out of debt, even if they possessed a far larger share of private means than fell to Jack's share.

But, if Torchester would have condemned young Horton's marriage, in any case most assuredly they would have condemned in double force his wedding such a penniless little nobody as Nancy Dering, the little organist of St. Mark's iron church, which stood in one of the poorest districts of Torchester, and was accounted as quite in the slums.

But it so happened Jack possessed a strong will and a brave heart. He fell in love with Nancy the first time he ever saw her, when she was performing dance music, at half a guinea the night, at a very select party given by Mrs. Malmaison, his Colonel's wife.

Subsequently he discovered she was the sister of a favourite schoolfellow whom he had lost sight of years before.

As Algy's friend he was welcomed to the shabby little house where Nancy lived with an old aunt; and it was so far from the haunts of all his fashionable acquaintance, that no one ever suspected his visits, and so things drifted on until Sir Douglas Horton's youngest son was actually engaged to the poor little organist.

She was a pretty girl, but her good looks were not of the kind which force themselves upon people at first sight. She might have passed unnoticed in a crowd; only those who had time for a second glance noticed the beauty of the dark, star-like eyes—as violet and velvetty in their depths as a pansy—and saw that the face had a wondrous sweetness despite its gravity, and a purity of complexion which contrasted well with the long, dark eyelashes.

Of course they were to "wait." Jack's pay was far too small to support a wife, while, if Sir Douglas had had even a hint of his boy's infatuation, he would have cut off every penny of the rather meagre allowance which supplemented what Jack earned from a grateful country; and at eighteen and twenty-four, "waiting" has not a very terrible sound.

They saw each other often. Aunt Hannah was the kindest and easiest of chaperones, and Nancy at least was perfectly happy.

But a change was coming. One dull February day, when Nancy was sitting over the fire, wondering why the second month in the year was always so cold and blustering, there was a loud knock at the door, and the small servant ushered in Mr. Horton.

Welcome as he always was, Nancy felt instinctively something was wrong even before she looked at his face, for Aunt Hannah had gone away only that morning on a visit to a relation in the country, and it had been arranged Mr. Horton should not call at Jasmine Cottage until her return; besides, he never came in

the afternoon, when Nancy was out as a rule, giving music lessons. What then had brought him now?

One look at his handsome, boyish face, and she saw something had happened. Could Sir Douglas have discovered everything? The very thought made her pale as death.

"Jack," she whispered, while he held her hand close in his, "dear Jack, what has happened? Only tell me."

They sat down side by side on the shabby, horse-hair sofa, and he told her all. Orders had come that morning for his regiment to proceed to Egypt; in three weeks' time they sailed.

The year was eighty-two; Arabi was then unconquered. Troops were starting every day for the seat of war; but it had never seemed to Nancy that her soldier would be called on to go there too.

"It won't last long," said poor Jack, with a desperate attempt at cheerfulness; "a few months, a year at most, and I shall be back again; but, Nan, I can't bear the leaving you."

She was made of true grit, this little music-teacher whom the Hortons would have thought so far beneath their boy. She said not a word to add to his sorrow, she never spoke of her own loneliness and grief, but she sat there looking at her hero with a fond adoration in her pansy eyes, and a great, quiet faith in Jack's return to her.

"I wish Aunt Hannah was here," she said, suddenly.

"I don't," returned Jack, quickly. "She's a dear old lady; but I want you to do something for me, sweetheart, and I think her influence might prevent it."

"What is it, Jack?"

The young soldier stooped and kissed her. No man ever loved a woman more devotedly than he did Nan.

"Look here, child," he said, abruptly, "I've got to go up to London to-night or to-morrow at latest. There'll be my outfit and a hundred things to see to, and only three weeks to do it in. Nan, it will have to be 'good-bye' to-morrow, unless you will come with me."

"Come with you?" She looked at him in bewilderment. "Why, Jack, how could I?"

The boy, he was little more despite his twenty-four years, unfolded his scheme. He would go up to London that very night and make all arrangements for their wedding.

Nan must come up by the first train on Monday, and ten minutes after reaching Victoria they would be married. There were no daily services at St. Mark's. If absolutely necessary she could return on Saturday, and he would take that chance of running down into Hertfordshire to see his family.

"You see, Nan," went on the soldier, eagerly, "it was almost arranged for you to go with your aunt, so people here will only think you changed your mind and followed her; and, dear, I shall be so much happier if I know it is my wife who is waiting for me in England."

There was a strange silence. Something in the girl's heart shrank from the scheme. She seemed to feel that trouble she could not define might come of it. On the other hand, it meant six whole days, perhaps more, of Jack's company, instead of parting almost at once—it might be for ever.

"Please Heaven I'll come back," he whispered, "and we'll have fifty years or more to spend together; but, Nan, there's always the chance of a bullet hitting me, and——"

Her eyes filled with tears. She did not see that it was selfish of Jack to wish her to run the risk of early widowhood. She did not guess the price she might have to pay for a few days of happiness.

"Only be my wife, Nan," he pleaded, "and I shall fight as one who has something to strive for, and if—no, not if, but when—I come back Sir Douglas and the rest must recognise you as my wife, when they have heard all you were willing to risk and brave for my worthless sake."

"I wish we could tell your father, Jack."

"It would never do," replied the young soldier, frankly. "The dear old man is in the most awful way already because he can't do much for me, and," he flushed a dusky red, "he's set his heart on my finding an heiress. No, no, Nan, wait till I come back with my next step, and maybe a wound. He must listen to me then."

"I wish your mother was alive," breathed Nan, "she would help us."

"Aye," agreed Jack, "she'd have understood; but, you see, Nan, she never had much power in the family. My father loved her dearly, but he is an old man, and fond of peace. Freda and Agnes had the upper hand even then. I was only a little chap when my mother died, and yet I seemed to understand—for all that she was Lady Horton and mistress of one of the loveliest places in Herts—she was not happy!"

It was a well-known story in the county, where the Hortons lived. Sir Douglas had married an heiress of enormous wealth and—people said—terrible temper.

A large portion of her fortune went to free the estate, but there remained enough to provide handsomely for her younger children.

She bore the baronet a large family, but after the two elder girls death was very busy in the Horton nursery, and so when the termagant, who had made Sir Douglas a miserable man, died, she left behind her only two daughters, already in society, and a feeble, ailing boy of nine.

The Misses Horton were far too gay and fashionable to look after their brother, and so a nursery governess was engaged, for the heir of Horton was far too precious to be sent away from home. Everyone declared it served his daughters right when Sir Douglas, then a handsome, well-preserved man of fifty, married this very governess, Daisy Smith.

Freda and Agnes were furious, but their anger could not annul the marriage. They did their best to blight the poor bride's life. Her husband had not energy enough to insist upon their either treating their stepmother properly or leaving his house; and so, as her only son had guessed, poor Lady Horton had a very troubled experience, and, save for her boy, was not sorry when Heaven called her home.

She died when Jack was ten years old. Freda and Agnes did not extend their enmity to her son, they were rather proud of Jack. He was so handsome, such a credit to the family, and he was quite powerless to rob them, for they had their mother's property, while their own brother Reginald must inherit the baronetcy and Horton Park. Jack was totally unprovided for, but he was so fascinating, his family fondly hoped he would win the heart and fortune of some heiress.

It had been instilled into him from his school days that he must marry money, and yet all the maxims which had been imparted to him had not prevented his losing his heart to pretty, portionless Nancy Dering.

And now he pleaded his cause bravely. An engagement he felt Sir Douglas would never sanction, but a marriage was different. If his boy came home a hero, the old man's heart would surely go out to that boy's wife—the girl who had been content to trust everything to Jack's word.

Nancy yielded. She was but eighteen, and she loved him. Jack was her hero, her knight. To the poor, tender-hearted girl there seemed no difference in her grief if he were killed, whether she wore his wedding-ring or not; and if, indeed, he were to be among the slain, how should she ever forgive herself for refusing his last request? So before Jack left Jasmine Cottage he took her promise that she would be at Victoria station by eleven o'clock on Monday morning, and would so have arranged matters that she need not return to Torchester before the following Saturday.

One would have said fate played into Jack's hands. The Curate-in-charge of St. Mark's, hearing of the organist's "little holiday," thought kindly it was a pity it should be so curtailed. His sister, then on a visit to him, possessed some musical skill, and would gladly take Miss Dering's place for one Sunday so as to give her a longer change.

Perhaps the grave, simple-minded clergyman was a little puzzled at the blush with which Nan accepted this kind offer. Her gratitude seemed so utterly out of proportion to the very slight favour offered.

Fortunately Mrs. Brown was neither given to writing many letters nor expecting many from her niece. She had gone to stay with her only son, a country surgeon in practice twenty miles from Torchester. His wife thought it a mercy "Cousin Nancy" required the old lady's companionship, and so prevented Ben's feeling it his duty to offer his mother a home. Mrs. Ben was not a bad woman, but she liked her home and her husband to herself. She therefore felt very charitably to little Nan, and could afford to be extremely polite to her mother-in-law on the rare occasions when the old lady visited her.

Mrs. Browne did remark once it was strange Nancy wrote so seldom, but in her next breath she observed the girl worked so hard it was no wonder she did not care to sit down to pen and ink while she was at home, and she might have remained in complete ignorance of Nan's absence, but that a neighbour of the surgeon's went into Torchester which was the nearest important town to Camelford, and brought back the news that she had called at Jasmine Cottage and been told by the little servant that Miss Dering was away.

"Good gracious!" said Susan Brown, "she ought not to go away, grandma, without telling you."

Aunt Hannah was too fond of Nan to betray how anxious the news had made her.

"It's lonesome for the child without me. I daresay Miss James, at the school where Nan teaches, asked her up there. She did last time I was here, and I told Nanny she was a very foolish child for refusing."

But, in spite of Mrs. Brown's professed content with her niece's arrangements, no power on earth would induce her to prolong her visit; and she started to return to Torchester the very day she had originally fixed, which was just a fortnight after Nan's wedding.

CHAPTER II.

STOLEN weddings are generally represented as gloomy, uncomfortable affairs; but there could not have been a cheerier, brighter day than that on which Nan left Torchester. It really seemed as though February had borrowed a little from its sister May, so blue and cloudless was the sky, so soft and balmy the air.

Nancy Dering knew very little of London. She had been brought up at Torchester High School, and spent her holidays with relations, so that she had had little occasion to visit the great metropolis.

As she stepped on to the platform at Victoria Station she felt like a stranger in a strange land; but Jack was waiting for her, and as he led her to a cab every feeling of loneliness vanished. He made her world, and she was quite content so that she was with him.

Mr. Horton had certainly made the most of his three days in London. Not only was everything arranged for the wedding, but he had taken apartments not five minutes' walk from Victoria Station, where he and his wife would spend the first days of their married life.

"I should have liked us to have had a proper honeymoon," he said regretfully, "but there's so much to do I don't believe I could get away from London."

"What does it matter where we spend our

honeymoon so that we are together," replied Nan, brightly. "Oh, Jack! I can't be sorry I came now, for if I hadn't I should not have seen you even to say good-bye."

"Not good-bye!" retorted Jack. "I shall come back soon. Everyone seems to think we shall soon teach these rebels their duty, and be back before the year is out."

It was a beautiful church where these two exchanged their vows. Like St. Mark's, Torchester, it stood in a poor locality, but it had nothing else in common with the little iron building Nan loved so well.

The clergyman was not young, and had grown used, perhaps, to quiet weddings, for he seemed to think it nothing remarkable that the bride should be dressed in black, and neither of the pair produce a single friend.

It was growing late, and he had an appointment at twelve, so for his own convenience he suppressed the exhortation about the Patriarchs, and in less time than she could have believed possible little Nan was out again in the sunshine with Jack's ring upon her finger.

They were little more than a pair of children after all. They went home to their lodgings and had lunch, and then they went to the Crystal Palace, where the pantomime was still on.

Altogether it was a most delightful day, and till night came Nan quite forgot the sad long parting which lay beyond.

Of course all days could not be like that first. Sometimes Jack had people to see, or shopping to do which took him from morning till seven at night; but at least the evenings remained, and he never spent one of them away from his little wife.

"Why in the world didn't you come to us?" demanded his brother Reginald, meeting him by chance at the club; "you know I wrote and said we could put you up; but you never answered."

"I've such heaps to do," replied Jack, quickly. "I should only be a nuisance staying with anyone. It was awfully good of you and Maria to think of it."

Mr. Horton was in Parliament, and his wife, Lady Maria, was quite a leader in her set; a very fashionable woman, but a kind-hearted one too, and though she had three children of her own, she had a place in her heart for Jack.

"Well, you must come and say 'good-bye' to us, or Maria 'll never forgive you. When do you sail?"

"This day week."

"That's sharp work. Have you been down to Horton?"

"I'm going on Saturday."

"I wonder my father isn't beside himself at the thought of your seeing active service. You are his Benjamin you know."

"He's too true a soldier not to wish me to see a battle. I think he'll miss me just a little."

"We shall all do that," said Mr. Horton, "Mind you take care of yourself, Jack. My life's not worth many years' purchase, and then there's only the young shaver at home between you and Horton. Remember that, please."

Jack looked at his half brother in surprise. Never had a thought come to him of inheriting the family honours.

"You'll live to be ninety Rex, and Maria may have half a dezen more sons. I'm far enough from Horton, and I'm glad of it."

"I believe you are," said the elder man, gravely. "Jack, old fellow, you're a true Horton, and somehow you and I seem to pull together better than I've ever been able to with the girls. Let me know how you get on out there, and if there's anything I can do for you, rely upon me as fully as though there was no step between our brotherhood."

They shook hands warmly. For a moment Jack thought of telling Reginald his secret. Then prudence reminded him the clever statesman who had married a duke's daughter would look with no merciful eye on a *mésalliance*, so the confidence remained unspoken.

It came at last, the moment when good-bye must be said. The second Saturday after Nancy's wedding she was forced to return to Torchester, as she had to resume her duties at St. Mark's the next morning. Jack was to see her off, and then go down to Horton for that farewell visit his father wondered had been so long delayed.

"You will write to me?" she pleaded. "Oh, Jack, your letters will be my only comfort."

"I'll write, Nan; but, dear, when we get in the thick of the conflict, you must remember it won't be so easy to send letters. Don't fancy I've forgotten you or grown careless, my darling, if it seems to you I write seldom."

"I should never think that, Jack."

He pressed a pocket-book into her hands, it contained a few bank notes—not many, for ready money had never been too plentiful with poor Jack, and just now his own requirements were great; but Sir Douglas had sent him a hundred pounds, and the half of this he gave to his wife.

"You may want money dear," he whispered. "Teaching isn't always plentiful, and I shouldn't like to think my little Nan lacked anything I could give her."

"And I may tell Aunt Hannah."

Jack hesitated.

"Must you, dear?" he pleaded. "She knows you are my betrothed. She knows you will be anxious about me and that we are sure to write to each other; Nan, I can't see any good in telling Mrs. Brown of our marriage."

"And you would rather she did not know."

"I fear in her eagerness for your rights—as she would think them—she would go straight to my father with the story, and, Nan, I know him so well. He would never forgive our marriage, if he heard of it from anyone but me."

"He never shall! Jack, I promise you I will never tell anyone—not even Aunt Hannah—that I am your wife. I will keep our secret, dear, till you come back to claim me."

"Heaven bless you, Nan!"

He put her into the train; his was the last face she saw as the engine bore her out of the terminus, then a mist seemed to come before her eyes. She was almost unconscious of her surroundings, and yet she could feel a sensation of relief that she was alone in the carriage, and there was no one to gloat over her misery with the curiosity of a stranger's keen eyes.

She had room but for one thought as she grew calmer—she had looked her last upon her lover-husband until his return from the wars. The dull, grey web of her life would not now be broken by the golden thread of his visits, she would have to go on her dull round of work, her daily fight for bread without hearing the voice which made music to her; she must stand alone.

And Aunt Hannah? It was easy to promise silence with Jack's bright eyes petitioning the favour, but in her heart Nan knew she had undertaken a difficult task.

Mrs. Brown had her full share of curiosity. She would be certain to hear the 90th had left Torchester for the seat of war, and would be intensely interested to know how and where Jack had taken leave of his *fiancée*.

The holiday in London Nan could explain. A cousin of her mother—no relation at all to her Aunt Hannah—lived at Battersea, and had repeatedly invited the young relative to visit her. On one day, when Jack was unusually busy, Nan had sought out Mrs. Russell, so she could speak of visiting her, though she was pitifully conscious it was an equivocation.

She reached Torchester at five. Probably at that very hour Jack was entering his father's carriage, the men-servants waiting with deep respect upon Sir Douglas Horton's son; he would bowl along towards Horton Park in the most luxurious style. His wife stepped into the shabby, station omnibus, which, after first visiting all the more important streets of the town, would condescend to lumber along the New-road and put her down at Jasmin Cottage.

"But Jack is used to being a grand person, and I never was," thought the girl. "I wish I was at Horton, just that we might be together for his last days in England, but I don't mind about anything else."

The curate of St. Mark's came in that evening to see the organist about the next day's services. He told Miss Daring, gravely, he did not think her holiday had done her good. She looked paler than when she went away.

"Oh, I am perfectly well, Mr. Mason," she said, cheerfully, "only rather tired. You see, I am not used to travelling, and it is a good way to London."

"I know. I am going farther than that myself on Monday. My youngest brother sails for Egypt Monday evening, and I have promised to go and see him off."

Nan would gladly have accompanied him; she knew vaguely that Mr. Mason's brother had been stationed at Torchester, but she had never seen him. Nan knew very few people in the garrison town; for though evil days had fallen on the family fortunes, Mrs. Brown could never forget that her father had been one of the wealthiest country gentlemen of Blankshire.

He ran through nearly everything before he died. Her brother followed his example, with the result that Nan and her brother were left utterly unprovided for; and the lad, who began his public school life at Wellington with Jack Horton, would probably have had to become a city clerk, if death had not stepped in and provided for him instead.

The people Aunt Hannah would have liked her niece to know ignored her, and the widow would not suffer Nan to mix in fourth-rate society; so, save for her pupils and their parents, little Miss Daring knew hardly anyone in Torchester. She had not even been often to visit her cousins at Carnelton, for Mrs. Brown, though admitting Susan made her son a good wife, was yet fully conscious of her want of refinement, and did not care for Nan to see too much of her while her own character and manners were still unformed.

Aunt Hannah possessed a hundred a-year of her own, a pension as the widow of an Indian official who had served his country well and truly. Nan earned, between the organ, her pupils, and playing at evening parties, perhaps fifty pounds per annum. Together the two ladies had managed to live happily on their joint incomes, but Aunt Hannah's died with her.

She had never been able to save, and therefore she had been delighted at Nan's engagement, hoping that before she had to leave her child Jack Horton would be able to claim his wife.

Sunday seemed an interminable day to poor Nan. It was the reaction after intense excitement, and its dull calm was almost torture to her. She would feel better, she told herself, when Jack had actually started on his voyage; but now to know him within reach, to feel that he was devoting his last day in England to others than herself, was terrible.

Miss James, the kind old school-mistress, waited for Nan in the church enclosure after evening service to say something about to-morrow's lessons, and, like Mr. Mason, she thought the young music teacher's holiday had not done her much good.

"But it's lonely for the child at Jasmine Cottage," she reflected, "now her aunt's away, I'll just take her home with me to supper, that'll cheer her up."

And perhaps it did, or else the fact of Aunt Hannah's return being so near forced Nan to rouse herself, for when she went out to her lessons on Monday she was just her old bright self; and all through the day she worked on as hard as possible, so that she might not give herself time to think.

Then at six o'clock she went down to the

railway station to meet her aunt, who would have felt terribly slighted if Nan had not been there to greet her.

The weather had changed now. March had come in cold and damp. On this Monday it had rained so continuously that in some places the roads looked like pools, and even the pavement was wet and soppy, though the rain had ceased as the afternoon wore on; and though Nan's umbrella was dripping, it was only from past service.

Nan knew the station at Torchester very well, for though not a frequent traveller, she was a regular customer at the bookstall, going there to buy the few papers and magazines she could afford to take in.

The head porter was father of Mrs. Brown's little servant, and so Nan knew that from him she was quite safe to obtain every information she could require.

It seemed to her to-night the train was unusually late, and after waiting a good while she sought out Jacob Clark, and asked if he could tell her the reason.

Nan was the only person waiting on that platform, for Torchester being the terminus of that particular branch the train went no farther, but its engine being reversed it was presently shunted on to the other line whence it started on its return journey to London.

Nan looked anxiously across. Yes, already quite a knot of people were there on the farther side waiting for the up train, and marvelling at its non appearance. There was a strange feeling of alarm at Nan's heart as she at last caught sight of the porter.

"Isn't the train very late, Jacob?"

"More than half-an-hour, miss. You weren't expecting your aunt, were you?"

"Yes, she said she should come by it, it is the only one of the later trains which stops at Camelton."

"I never knew this here train so late before," said the porter, reluctantly; "the station-master's going to telegraph up the line if she ain't signalled pretty soon. Won't you go across, Miss Dering, it's more cheerful like the other side. There's a waiting-room and people to talk to."

"I don't want anyone to speak to," said Nan, half peevishly. "The train will come in this side, won't she?"

"I can't say, I'm sure, miss; but if there's anything to hear you'll hear it sooner over there. The station-master's there, you see, and a lot of the gentry."

Nan yielded. She would fain have clung to her solitude, but the anxiety at her heart for her aunt's safety conquered all other feelings, and, reluctantly, she crossed the bridge to the other side, where the first person she met was her friend kind, Miss James.

"Don't be frightened, dear," said the old lady, quietly; "but there's been an accident. You mustn't fret, Nancy. Only one carriage is injured, and most likely Mrs. Brown wasn't in that."

White to her very lips was Nan.

"She is so nervous, the shock alone would be terrible for her. Oh! please tell me all you know."

It was very little. The telegrams despatched up the line had produced the information that the missing train had run into another, consisting chiefly of coal trucks, near Marden, about ten miles from Torchester, one carriage had been injured. It was reported two or three people were killed.

The guard had tramped himself to Marden with the news, and a doctor and other aid had at once started.

"We can do nothing but wait," said Miss James, gently, "the passengers will be sent on to their homes as soon as possible."

But Jacob Clark had a suggestion more acceptable to the girl's over-wrought feelings.

"Marden's but a small place with only one doctor. Two of our surgeons are going down now with a gang of plate-layers to dig out part of the coal-trucks that have been smashed. It's likely they'd take missie, too, if she wanted."

And so at the very hour when Jack was leaving England his Nancy was hurrying to the scene of a terrible disaster.

Only one carriage accompanied the relief engine. It had three compartments. The workmen took up two, the doctors, Nan, and kind Miss James the last.

"You must take courage,' said one of the doctors, who knew Nan well. "The telegram distinctly said only one carriage was injured. Don't make up your mind your aunt was in that. Very likely we shall find her quite well, waiting impatiently for a train to bring her on to Torchester to relieve your anxieties.'

Nan thanked him, but took no comfort. Something, a nameless feeling at the heart, told her trouble was in store.

Over and over again she had pictured her first meeting with Aunt Hannah, over and over again she had thought how to evade the dear old lady's questions and keep the secret of her marriage, and so, perhaps, this was to be her punishment. The voice, whose kindly inquiries she had so dreaded, would never speak to her again.

They reached Marden at last. The workmen would go on to the scene of the accident, but the doctors and their companions would alight, for passengers, both whole and injured, had already been brought to the little rustic station, where they were eagerly waiting for a train to take them on to their homes at Torchester and the two intermediate stations between Marden and the Garrison Town.

Dr. Grey made a few hasty inquiries, and turned to Nan with a kind, grave face.

"I am sorry to say Mrs. Brown was in the injured carriage. She is not seriously hurt, but has been very much shaken. Do you feel calm enough to go to her?"

Nan rose up at once, and he led her into a little waiting-room, where a still quiet, form lay on the horsehair sofa.

Nan knelt down and took one of the ice-cold hands in hers. "Not seriously hurt!" Why then did Aunt Hannah not speak to her? If there was not much the matter, why were her eyes closed as though nothing on earth could open them?

CHAPTER III.

It was April, the sweetest month in early spring, but there was nothing of the season's hope and gladness in Nan's face as she sat in the shabby parlour where but a few weeks before she had consented to Jack's desire for a secret marriage.

Her face was pale and thin. It had the sad weariness often seen in those recovering from a long illness, but for all that Nancy Dering had not herself been laid low. It was only that for days and weeks she had watched anxiously by the bedside of her second mother, hoping against hope that the mind might yet return to its earthly tabernacle before the end.

Those who told Dr. Grey Mrs. Brown was "not much hurt" had been mistaken, as the skilful physician at once discovered when he examined her. True, no bones were broken, no outward injury could be perceived, but the nervous system had received a terrible shock, and this had to a certain extent paralyzed the brain.

When her own son, himself a surgeon, came over to Torchester the next day, the great medical genius of the garrison town told him the truth plainly.

'She may last for months, though I hardly think it; but long or short as her space of life may be, she will never recover the use of her faculties. It will be a kind of living death. So, my good friend, for her own sake and yours I can't wish she may survive for long."

Ben Brown knew Dr. Grey well. He had served his time as assistant to him before he settled at Camelton. He felt he could trust his old friend and employer thoroughly.

"My wife's a good wife," he said, simply, "and she'd not refuse for my mother to come to us if I wished it. But I'm not a rich man, the house is small and full of children. I can't help feeling she'd be as well off really at Jasmine Cottage."

"Better," said Dr. Gray, bluntly. "She needs no special skill in nursing, only such care and tendance as people give to a sick child. Her servant's mother, Mrs. Clark, is a handy woman, and might come in for a few hours a day. Miss Dering would do the rest."

"It's Nan I'm thinking of," confessed Mr. Brown. "She's but a young thing and has her life before her. I shouldn't like her to give up all her teaching here and bury herself in Camelton to look after my mother, knowing that when the old lady died and her annuity stopped we couldn't afford to give my cousin a home."

"I see. No, I agree with you, Miss Dering ought not to leave Torchester. I believe myself your mother will not last long, and I think with Mrs. Clark's help her niece can manage the nursing for a time."

And he was right. Aunt Hannah did not "last long." In less than a month after she was brought home helpless she was carried to her grave. She never recovered voice or intelligence, though sometimes Nan used to fancy the dull eyes brightened at her presence. She never troubled about anything that went on around her, and when she died poor Nancy felt more that she was alone in England than that she had lost her protector.

Benjamin Brown behaved liberally to his cousin. He was going to have a sale of his mother's furniture, but he had promised Nan the free use of it if she cared to stay on in Jasmine Cottage for a month just to "turn over her plans," and, it must be confessed, unknown to his wife, he put a crisp bank-note into her hand, telling her it was for mourning and such things.

And now the funeral was over, the only creature in England who cared for Nan was in her grave, and the girl had to sit down and think over her future, as it seemed to her, without a word of help or counsel.

She had heard from Jack once since his arrival in Egypt. His letter was written before he received hers, telling of her aunt's accident, and ran in the highest spirits. He was delighted with the prospect of seeing real war, hopeful of soon defeating the foe and returning safely to his own little wife. It was a lovely tender letter, but every note was in a joyous key, and seemed a strange contrast to poor Nan's desolation.

There was a wide gulf, Nan thought, between her and Jack. He was happy with friends around him, his profession to occupy him, a name to win, and glory to earn, while she—The tears welled up into her eyes. Poor child, she had nothing in the world to occupy her except the struggle to earn her own living in some way that should not throw discredit on her husband when he came back to claim her. A knock at the door was disregarded, then Mr. Mason entered gently, closing it behind him.

"I want to talk to you," he said, gently, "and I have come to-night because I knew you would be alone."

'Please don't ask what my plans are," cried Nan, with a little sob which was almost hysterical. "Everyone is doing that, and they don't seem to believe me a bit when I say I haven't got any."

"I did not come to ask your plans," said the clergyman, gravely, "but to suggest one I had thought of for you."

Nancy Dering shook her head.

"I'd rather not hear it, Mr. Mason. I feel as if the last month had crushed all the life and hope out of me. I can't think, I can't reason, I can hardly feel. It's as though my heart and brain were numb."

He looked at her with a great pity on his kind face.

"I must tell you what I have come to say, but I promise you I won't worry you about it.

I won't even ask you for an answer till you feel you can give it."

"Well?"

It was not a promising permission; but the clergyman knew the terrible shock her aunt's illness had been to Nan. He never said a word of reproach for her petulance. He only told her he loved her very dearly and wanted to make her his wife.

"St. Mark's is a poor parish," he said, gravely, "but I have private means. I can promise you that no hardships shall ever touch you if you will trust yourself to me."

"I couldn't," gasped poor little Nan, thinking of her wedding on that bright, February morning not so long ago, and forgetting Mr. Mason had, of course, no suspicion of it, "how can you ask me?"

"I am more than twice your age," he admitted, "but I am still under forty, and I would make you happy if love could do it. Little girl, won't you think of it?"

"I couldn't, oh! I couldn't."

He guessed something of the truth then. Not the marriage. That he never dreamed of, but an instinct told him he had a successful rival.

"Is there someone else?"

Nan nodded. Then feeling she was not treating this generous man fairly, she forced her trembling lips to speak.

"We were engaged six months ago. Aunt Hannah approved of it, but we knew we should have to wait a long time, and she agreed it would be better to keep our secret."

"And your betrothed is in Torchester?" asked the clergyman, wondering if this were so why he had not been near Jasmine Cottage.

"Oh, no, he went abroad; but he will come back to claim me," and she began to cry.

With an unselfishness, rare as it was noble, the clergyman put aside his own disappointment to comfort her.

"If he is coming back and you trust each other, you need not grieve so, you have happiness in the future to look forward to, even if if the present is dark."

She turned her beautiful violet eyes appealingly to him.

"I feel so terribly alone—it almost frightens me."

"You are tired and overstrung, you will feel better for a good night's rest; and when you are able to think of your plans, go and talk to Miss James, she is a good woman and very fond of you. I am going now. Remember, I shall keep your secret always, and if ever I can be of any help to you let me know."

When he was gone Nany sat down, and sobbed as though her heart would break, but those tears saved her. They broke down the miserable numb despair which had gathered like a cloud over her mind. When she grew calmer she could think of Jack and take comfort.

The next day she went round to the school in Torchester High-street, and asked to see Miss James. The old lady was not prepared for her favourite's request.

"Do you think you could find me a situation in London?" asked Nancy, anxiously, "for I shall never be happy in Torchester again."

Miss James put on her gold rimmed eyeglasses, and stared at Nancy.

"All your friends live here; you have spent your whole life in the place; why should you wish to leave it?"

"I have no home here now. Even if I had furniture I couldn't afford to keep on Jasmine Cottage."

"But, my dear, many families would take you to board with them. I might arrange to have you here in return for some more teaching."

Nan shook her head.

"Please don't think me ungrateful, but I can't stay here now I have lost Aunt Hannah, and I'd rather go to London than anywhere.'

"Why?" demanded Miss James, abruptly. "Surely you are not thinking of pleasures and gaiety, with your aunt just buried?"

"I am not likely to have any pleasure," said Nancy; "but teaching is cheap in London. If I worked very hard all day I might be able to afford myself some finishing lessons in music and singing of an evening."

"Of course it is always wise to improve one's self," confessed Miss James; "but——"

"It would fill up my mind," pleaded Nancy, "and keep me from fretting."

"But, my dear, what kind of situation did you want? It would need a good one indeed to keep you in lodgings and pay for lessons too."

Nan blushed.

"I have a little money," she said, simply, "and I could spend that on lessons. Then very humble lodgings would suit me, and Cousin Ben paid for all my mourning, so I shall'n't want any clothes for a long time."

"Well, it seems a mad scheme to me. What will Mr. Mason say to your leaving St. Mark's? How will the organ get on without you?"

But Mr. Mason, when appealed to by Miss James, said, frankly, he thought Nan's idea a good one.

"She has talent," he observed, gravely, "and is sure to get on. She will do better in London, where no one knows her antecedents, than here where every spiteful gossip would remember her giving music lessons at a shilling an hour, and living in a poor little place like Jasmine Cottage."

"Well, the world has come to a pretty pass," cried Miss James, indignantly, "if clergymen take to encourage any foolish ideas girls pick up just because they're pretty. I would have taken Nancy Dering as junior teacher, and given her a good home, while what you pay her as organist would have kept her in pocket money. Instead of that she's to go rampaging off to London where she doesn't know a single creature!"

"She will know one," said Mr. Mason, quietly, "for I shall give her a letter of introduction to my sister."

Mrs. Warburton was not the sister who had recently visited Torchester, but an older lady, the wife of a rising doctor at the West-end of London.

She was prosperous now, but there had been a time in her early married days when she had found it very difficult to make both ends meet, and had owed a great deal to her brother's kindness. Hers was not a nature to forget such things, and there was little doubt the curate's *protégée* would receive every attention at Adela's hands.

Events followed each other so quickly that before Nancy could believe she was really going to leave Torchester for ever she was actually on her way to London to spend a fortnight with Mrs. Warburton, at the end of which time that kindly matron had promised to find her rooms within easy distance, so that she might come every day and teach the elder children, if on acquaintance she and Miss Dering liked each other.

It is very likely the doctor's wife read between the lines of the curate's letter, and thought it would be all the better for her brother not to meet almost daily a girl who could never return his affection; but she betrayed no hint of this to Nancy, only as she installed her in the pleasant guest-chamber of her handsome house, she held the girl's hand very closely and said, kindly,—

"I hope you will try and feel at home with us, Miss Dering. If my eldest girl had lived, she would be just your age, and I should like to help you for her sake."

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs Warburton was as good as her word. She was kindness itself to little Nan, and the fortnight of rest and perfect freedom from care which the girl passed in Durham-street did much to repair the ravages grief and nursing had made in her looks.

The children adored her, every creature in the house spoke well of her with one exception—old Mrs. Mason, who lived with her daughter, took a dislike to Nancy from the first, and never lost a chance of showing it.

The old lady had an almost idolatrous love for her son, the curate of St. Mark's, and guessing that little Miss Dering had actually alighted the being for whose wife she would not have esteemed a princess too good, the widow, with the malice of a narrow mind, resolved upon revenge.

It was rather difficult at first for this vindictive old lady to conceive how this was to be achieved, for though Dr. and Mrs. Warburton did their best for her comfort, they did not seek her advice in the management of their children; and to several disparaging remarks about the "new governess" Adela returned that she was perfectly satisfied with Miss Dering, while the doctor, who had a judicious dread of the old lady's tongue, invariably said he left all such matters to his wife. How to get rid of Nan became a serious problem to Mrs. Mason.

The girl was established now in very homely lodgings not ten minutes' walk from Durham-street, and she came to the doctor's house from ten to four, for which she received the not outrageous salary of sixty pounds a year.

It was June, barely a month after Nan had migrated to the lodgings, and Dr. Warburton had arranged to take his wife into the country to see some relatives from Friday to Tuesday, when Mrs. Mason point-blank refused to be left alone with the children, and, much to everyone's surprise, insisted that Miss Dering should stay in the house for the whole time of their mother's absence.

"I don't like the girl," she said, tartly, "but she keeps the children in order; and at my time of life I don't care to be bothered with them."

The Warburtons agreed to ask Nan, who, though she rather shrank from being thrown much with the widow, yet could not refuse any request of theirs; and so Miss Dering returned to Durham-street as a guest, bringing with her only a few trifling toilet necessaries; as her lodgings were so near, it would be easy for her to fetch anything she wanted.

Friday evening passed off admirably. Granny was quite amiable under the influence of backgammon; the faint uneasiness which had troubled Nan wore off, and she rose on the Saturday morning in the best of spirits.

It was at breakfast; the meal was really over, but Mrs. Mason lingered at the table, and Nan was cutting the *Times* for her, when suddenly, without one word of warning, the girl uttered one bitter, heart-rending cry, and fell senseless at the old lady's feet.

The white, grief-stricken face might have touched the sternest heart, but it did not arouse the least pity in Mrs. Mason's. Without an attempt to revive the girl she snatched at the paper, and cast her eyes down the page which Nan had been looking at when she fainted. It was the war news, and the astute old lady had not the slightest doubt Nan had seen the name of someone near and dear to her in the list of the "killed."

"Serves her right for refusing my son," decided Mrs. Mason, quite forgetting she would have regarded it as the height of presumption had Nan accepted him; "but I suppose I had better see to her. Adela is so absurd, she fusses over Miss Dering as though she were an equal, and would be dreadfully offended if I neglected her."

With the help of two of the servants, Nan was carried to her own room, and laid on the pretty white bed. The maids suggested sending for Mr. Acton, their master's assistant, who was even then in the surgery; but Mrs. Mason ridiculed the idea—if she could not manage a simple fainting fit she'd like to know the reason why. They might go and leave her to see to Miss Dering.

Left alone with Nan, she unfastened the

simple black dress, and what did she discover? Round the neck, supported by a slender white ribbon, she saw what made her start—though, after all dozens of such things meet one's eyes every day, though people do not usually wear them out of sight—a gold wedding ring!

"The minx!" ejaculated Mrs. Mason, "that's the meaning of her turning up her nose at a man worlds too good for her, and actually coming into this house as 'Miss.' The audacity of it; but I'll be even with her."

It was so long before the swoon gave way to restoratives, that Mrs. Mason began to feel uncertain whether death had not stepped in to rob her of her revenge; but at last the beautiful violet eyes opened slowly, and in a faint, weary voice, Nan, cried piteously,—

"Oh, say it was not true. Tell me it is only a mistake!"

"It's true enough," said Mrs. Mason, coldly. "At least it's true that you were reading the war news in the *Times*, and suddenly fainted away."

"His name was there," moaned Nan. "His name! I shall never see him again. Oh!" with a sudden fear, "what have I done? Have I broken my promise, and told my secret?"

"You have told nothing," said the old lady, contemptuously. "You would have kept your shameful secret, and imposed on me to the end, but that has betrayed you," and she pointed to the wedding-ring.

Nan's heart was well-nigh broken, but these taunts seemed to give her a calm and self-command no tender sympathy could have done. At a loving word she would have burst into tears; under Mrs. Mason's cruel treatment, she became as calm and composed as though she had been a statue.

"There was nothing shameful in my conduct," she said, gravely. "I was married privately last February, because my lover was going to Egypt, and he wished to leave me his wife. I promised him I would never tell anyone of the marriage until he returned to claim me. He never will return now."

"I call it shameful," retorted Mrs. Mason. "Haven't you called yourself 'Miss Dering' all the time you've been here? Haven't you let my daughter introduce you to people as an unmarried girl?"

"It was wrong," confessed Nan, "but I do not think it harmed anyone. Why should strangers care to know my secret?"

"Secrets are always dishonourable!" retorted the widow. "But I'll have no more of this. Either you tell me your husband's name, and show me your marriage lines, or out of this house you go to-day. I've no patience with romantic love affairs."

"Mrs. Warburton will believe in me," said Nan, moved to rebellion.

"She will not. If there is one thing in the world my daughter and her husband are hard upon it, is deceit; and you can't deny that you have deceived them thoroughly."

"But——"

"I don't want to be hard on you," said Mrs. Mason, which statement it was difficult to credit. "I give you your free choice. Tell me your husband's name and the church where you were married to him, and I'll promise to forgive you myself and do my best to make your peace with Adela and the doctor—if not, out of this house you go. I'll give you an hour to make up your mind."

Poor Nan!

Was is not grief enough to read Jack's name among the list of the slain, to know that never more would they two meet on this side of the grave? But to have this terrible decision forced on her before she had well realised her misery—oh, it was terrible!

But Nan never thought of betraying her secret. She had promised Jack never to reveal their marriage until he had first told his father. She knew that Sir Douglas would mourn for his favourite son with a grief only less than hers. She would not give him the bitter pang of learning that Jack had concealed from him the most important act of his life.

No. As to confessing her husband's name she never hesitated, but she did doubt whether to appeal to the Warburtons against Mrs. Mason's verdict. She had their address and could easily have written, but one thing held her back. Liberal and generous-minded on all other points, she knew both Adela and her husband condemned all stolen marriages. For the heroine of a secret wedding their censure would be very keen.

"And they might guess the truth," she pondered. "Mr. Mason might inquire at Torchester and find out how often Jack came to Jasmine Cottage. Oh! no, it would never do. I had better go away."

When Mrs. Mason came back an hour later to hear her victim's decision, it was to find the room empty, and the poor, girl who had been in such a short space both wife and widow, flown.

The servants, indignant at the old lady's conduct, though they little guessed to what lengths she had gone, afterwards in refusing to send for Mr. Acton, waylaid the young assistant when he returned from his morning round, and told him of Miss Dering's illness.

"She looked like death, sir; and if she's gone home, as the old lady says she has, I should think she'd fallen down on the way, for she was nothing but a poor little white ghost."

Philip Acton took the information in good part. He was used to little confidences from all sorts of people, for he was one of those men who seem to inspire faith from all.

"I don't know Miss Dering's address, but I'll get it from the children and call to see her this afternoon. She never looks very strong, and she wouldn't have gone away in Mrs. Warburton's absence unless she had felt really ill."

But an urgent summons in another direction, if it did not put the matter out of Mr. Acton's head, at least prevented his attending to it till late in the evening. About eight o'clock, having found out her governess's address from little Mary Warburton, he turned down the quiet street and knocked at the door of No 51. A very decent woman opened it, but when Philip asked for Miss Dering she shook her head.

"Are you a friend of the poor young lady's, sir?"

"Hardly that, but I am Dr. Warburton's assistant, and as he is away from home I hoped she would allow me to prescribe for her."

"Walk in, please sir," said the woman, civilly; but when she had got Mr. Acton safe into the front parlour she burst into sobs, and it was some time before she could go on speaking. At last, wiping her eyes with her apron, she continued,—

"She was a sweet young lady, sir, and I'm sure a good one; but she's gone, and we'll never any of us see her again."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Philip, seriously alarmed.

"Just that, sir. Miss Dering she came in this morning while I and my man sat at dinner. I waited for her to ring, she'd let herself in with her latch-key, but she never did, and at last when Hall had gone out I went up to her. She was sitting where you are now, sir, looking as white as death, and she just said to me, 'I've had bad news, Mrs. Hall, and I must go away.'

"It took me all on a heap, sir, for Mrs. Warburton, which I was housemaid to for ten years, said the young lady'd no near relatives; but I couldn't go against her when she sat there looking so ill, so I just set to and helped her to pack. There wasn't much to do, for Miss Dering cared nothing for dress, and she'd fewer things than most young ladies. It was all ready by three o'clock, and I fetched her a cab. She paid me a fortnight's rent instead of notice, which I'd never have asked her for, and she shook hands with me as though I'd been a lady."

"But where has she gone to?"

"I've no idea; but since she went, sir, and I've had time to think it over, I'd not be surprised if the old lady sent her."

"Meaning Mrs. Mason?"

"Just that, sir. You see, I know, begging your pardon, she has a temper. None of us servants could bear her when I lived with Mrs. Warburton, and the nurse did tell me the other day Mrs. Mason hated Miss Dering, and was always putting on her."

"But she couldn't send her away at a moment's notice."

"There's no telling what the old lady'd not do when she's in a tantrum," said Mrs. Hall, feelingly. "You see, sir, at first I took it Miss Dering had lost some near relation and was going to them. It was only when I'd time to think I remembered she'd no one much belonging to her, and 'bad news' needn't mean death, though I thought it did."

"But surely if Mrs. Mason had dismissed her she need not have left here. She must have known Mrs. Warburton would set everything to rights as soon as she came home."

Mrs. Hall shook her head.

"There's no saying, sir. Maybe Miss Dering didn't like to make words between mother and daughter. Anyway, she's gone, and I'm sorry for it."

There was nothing for it but to go back to Durham-street with his troubled thoughts. Mr. Acton had taken a great interest in Mrs. Warburton's governess, but that interest had never ripened into anything more, because from the first the young surgeon had felt certain that Miss Dering had done her loving.

Going over the facts of the morning as well as he could gather them, he came to the conclusion that he was right, and she had a lover. She must have read something about him in the *Times*, and fainted on the spot. So much was clear; but why she had left Durham-street he could not quite make out.

But he was to hear the next day.

Mrs. Mason, in reply to her grandchildren's questions, told them at lunch, before him, that their governess was a very wicked woman, and she had sent her away.

Philip Acton waited till the meal was over, and then begged a word in private with the old lady. He was a great favourite of hers, probably because his father was a wealthy baronet, and so she granted his request most amiably; but she was hardly prepared for his first remark.

"Mrs. Mason, as a friend I must warn you if you speak of Miss Dering like that, and it gets back to her, she may bring an action for libel against you."

"Fudge!" declared the widow, "I'm not afraid of that. She wouldn't dare; besides, it's perfectly true!"

"I wish you would tell me why she left here?" he went on gravely. "I had believed her as much a fixture as any governess can be."

"It's a blessing my foolish Adela was away," said the old lady, practically, "when it was found out. She's so stupidly weak, I daresay she would have forgiven the deception and kept her."

"But what had Miss Dering done?"

"She's no more Miss Dering than you are; she married some common soldier, and went into hysterics because she saw his death in the *Times*."

"I don't think she was the sort of girl to marry beneath her."

"I don't care whether he was beneath her or not. She has a wedding-ring round her neck, and when I questioned her she admitted, with no shame at all, that she was married last February, and kept the secret at her husband's wish. He went out to Egypt and got himself killed, it seems; and a good thing too, for such marriages never answer!"

"What was his name?"

"I haven't an idea. I told her if she would

tell me his name and where they were married, I would try and get my daughter to look over her conduct. In fact, I gave her an hour to make up her mind; but she took herself off instead. I daresay she will write some pitiful story to Adela from her lodgings."

"That is impossible. She left them early on Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Mason have a little pity upon this poor lonely girl."

"She deserved none. She lured my eldest son on to propose to her, and then rejected him scornfully."

"I don't think she could be scornful. And how could she help refusing your son when she was a wife already? Just think what she must be feeling now! Her husband's death made known to her in that awfully sudden way; alone in London, and cast off by her only friends."

"Well, she deserves it all."

"I don't think so; but you might be merciful. You have a son engaged in this same war. How would you feel if you read his name suddenly in the list of slain?"

It was a random shot, but it struck home. Mrs. Mason cowered for a moment as one stricken by a blow. Then she recovered, and said, hastily,—

"My boy is safe enough. We had excellent accounts of him by the last mail."

CHAPTER V.

A TEMPORARY hospital; only a rough line of tents under canvas, where on camp-beds lay the wounded in the late encounter, tended by the skilful doctors who had followed the campaign, and the trained nurses come from England for that purpose. Very different from the stately buildings private munificence has raised in England for the use of the sick, and yet with the same strange peacefulness—the same shutting out of all worldly business which pervades an English hospital; yet with this subtle difference—it was not the aged, not those wasted by long ravages of disease and suffering who lay there, but strong men smitten down as it were in the pride of their youth and health by the deadly power of war.

There were not many there—twenty, perhaps, all told—for only the more serious cases which would not bear removal to the regular military hospital were here.

There was very little hope of many of them, for some the next sunrise would find them "sleeping."

It was a sad sight, and so thought the Army Surgeon as he made his nightly round in company with the Sister.

They paused before one bed, whose occupant was sleeping peacefully—a young face almost boyish save for its ghastly pallor, brought on by faintness and loss of blood.

"He will do now," said the Doctor, with a grunt of approval; "but it was touch and go. He's a brave young fellow, and he'll have his company if he gets over this, for death has played sad havoc with the officers, and that makes promotion rapid."

"Who is he?" asked the nurse. "He looks as though some mother's heart would be aching for him in England."

"He's no mother, poor lad; but he's his father's Benjamin, the joy of his old age. It's John Horton, old Sir Douglas's youngest son."

"Horton! Are you sure?"

"Yes. Why, did you know him?"

"I know no one here," she answered; "but when they came yesterday to take the names of the dead and wounded to cable to England I gave his as among the killed. It was not quite my fault; the man in that bed"—she glanced at an empty pallet opposite—"died as soon as he was brought in, and the cloak he was wrapped in had the name 'John Horton' on the collar."

"It must have been caught up to throw over him," said Dr. Graham, musingly; "that was Paul Mason, the youngest Sub in the regiment, a good-hearted young fellow, but nothing to compare with Horton. Don't trouble yourself about the mistake, it was a most natural one. The two were chums, had taken up wonderfully with each other since they came out; there's no harm done."

"Oh! but there is," cried the nurse, sadly. "Don't you see, Dr. Graham, his people"—she looked anxiously at Jack—"will mourn him as dead."

"Only for a couple of days. I'll set it right in the next despatches home. Joy never kills, you know, and they will forget their sorrow in thankfulness."

"And Mr. Mason?"

"Well, Sister, it'll be a blow for his people; but, remember, they would never have felt free from anxiety about him till the war was over. I don't think their believing him alive and well just a few days longer than was the case can harm them. Anyway, don't worry. You acted for the best, and mistakes happen to the wisest of us."

He spoke encouragingly to her because he could see the terrible self-reproach she was suffering, but he really felt troubled.

Apart from his professional acquaintance with Jack, he had been the friend of the Horton family for years. He knew how wrapped up in his youngest son the old baronet had always been, and he feared the effect of the mistake upon him so much that he never rested until he had provided for the transmission of a private telegram to Reginald Horton, which, though it was composed of four words only would bring joy to the whole family.

"Mistake. Brother doing well."

He did not take the same amount of trouble about Paul Mason. He did not see the need. As well leave his friends in their peaceful security a little longer. Time enough for the truth to be broken to them when a letter could be sent home, whose tidings would be less cruelly abrupt than just the bare announcement by telegram.

Dr. Graham and the nurse had considered Jack "doing well," but his wound was far too serious for recovery to be anything but slow and tedious, and it was the middle of August before he could be carried on board a homeward-bound vessel, and sent to England invalided, under the devoted care of the ship's doctor and his soldier-servant.

He had been most anxious, as soon as he recovered consciousness, to be allowed to write; but his right arm was utterly disabled, and he had never learned to use his left hand. The Sister took down a few whispered words of love and encouragement, and directed them to the name and address he gave her—Miss Dering, Jasmine Cottage, Torchester.

He had received Nancy's letters telling of her aunt's illness, and the last which had reached him spoke of her removal to London and engagement at Mrs. Warburton's; but in the terribly shattered state of his nerves those later letters passed from poor Jack's mind, and he thought of his little girl at Torchester, busy with the simple round of daily toil which she had followed when he knew her first. Aunt Hannah's death he did recollect, but he fancied Nan still living at the Cottage and teaching music.

As he grew better he began to worry terribly over the absence of letters. Nurse and doctor reminded him that his father had written by every mail, that his brother, though almost prostrate with grief at the death of his little son, had sent more than one affectionate note. How could they guess the young soldier's secret, and that his recovery was retarded by anxiety about his—wife?

Her last letter was dated June the first. He was able to realise as he read it that the Sister had written to Torchester, and Nan must have left there weeks before. Through the vicissitudes of war it was long after the time he should have received that letter of June the first, and after that he seemed to live in anxious expectation, exciting himself so terribly when any mail came in, that Dr. Graham and the nurse were positively thankful, for his own sake, when he was once on board the good ship *Serapis* under weigh for England.

"My brother will meet me at Southampton," had been Jack's cry all along. "I know Rex will be waiting to welcome me—he promised it."

But when the troop-ship with its invalided passengers reached Southampton harbour, the quiet, grave young man whom politicians of his own side of the House had thought such a rising member was not there; and one of the first persons who went on the steam-launch despatched to board the *Serapis* was an old gentleman with silvery hair, dressed in the deepest mourning, who leant on the arm of a lady in widow's weeds.

Sir Douglas's own daughters had declared it was too much for their nerves to meet poor Jack in such a public place; but Lady Maria, who was at Horton with her little girls, knew what her husband's wishes would have been; and though it was not a month since she had stood by his open grave, she offered herself at once to be Sir Douglas's companion.

"Their aunts will see to the children," she said, simply, "and I will come with you, father. If Rex had been here he would have been the first to welcome Jack, and I must take his place."

Never a thought came to the gentle lady that Jack now stood in her husband's place; that the death of Reginald, the loss of her little boy, had changed the young soldier from a needy officer to the heir-apparent of the Hortons.

Lady Maria was a rarely unselfish woman. She had idolized her husband and son, but yet she bore Jack no malice because the deaths of these two had brought him wealth.

Her three little girls were amply provided for, her own fortune was a large one; why then should she grudge her brother-in-law his prosperity?

Agnes and Freda Horton called Lady Maria unnatural. They thought she could never have cared for Reginald, or she would have hated the very thought of seeing Jack; but they did not understand their sister-in-law felt the nearer to her husband while she took up his duties and tried to fulfil them.

Old Sir Douglas loved her dearly, and was intensely grateful for her company. The last accounts of Jack had been reassuring, but the old man was haunted with a fear something was being kept back from him, and that his darling had only "come home to die."

"I shall never bear it," he said Lady Maria, sadly. "I am an old man, and Jack is the last hope of my house; if he dies I shall never hold up my head again."

But Lady Maria told him gently she did not think Jack in any danger, and that she had given orders for them to be expected at her own house in town, for she did not think the longer journey into Hertfordshire would be good for an invalid.

"Besides," she said, brightly, "if he is better, he will have to report himself at the War Office, and if he is worse, you can get such much better advice for him in London. Besides, it will be easier for me to nurse him there; at Horton, Freda might think is her right, and she is rather oppressive in a sick room. You must go to him first," she said, as they neared the ship, "and break it to him. He was very fond of Rex, and if he saw me so," and she touched her widow's bonnet, "it might be a shock to him."

Sir Douglas burst into tears when he saw his boy, although the united voices of surgeon, captain, and servant assured him there was a wonderful improvement in their charge since the commencement of the voyage.

He could only feel that this thin, gaunt invalid was not the merry, boyish-looking son he had parted from, and he broke down utterly.

"I shall lose him too! It is not a month since I buried his brother, and now——"

A low cry escaped Jack.

"Rex can't be dead!" he cried, bitterly.

"Why, I had two letters since the boy's loss, and he never mentioned illness."

"He never had an illness—it was heart disease. In the morning he was well, in the evening he was gone. Maria is here with me; she told me to break it to you, but I'm afraid I've made a bungle of it. Oh! Jack, you must get better, for you are the last of the old name."

* * * *

"Jack, are you beside yourself?"

The speaker was Lady Maria Horton. She had come in to sit with her brother-in-law the morning after his return, and found him not only up and dressed, but instructing his soldier-servant to go for a cab.

"I must go," he said, with all the fretfulness of convalescence. "Don't try to stop me, Maria!"

"My dear boy, the War Office can wait. You are not fit to leave your bed."

Andrew gave a shrewd glance at his lady as though to say his best efforts had already been made, and he left the attempt to her; then he went away, and the young widow took the wasted hand in hers as gently as though the young soldier had been one of her own little children.

"Don't you know your father's every hope is centred on you? You must take care of yourself for his sake."

"I don't want to go to the War Office," said Jack, tottering to a chair, for his strength was giving way and he could hardly stand; "but there is something I must do, no one else can see to it, and the anxiety is driving me frantic."

Every letter from his nurse had spoken of him as retarding his recovery by anxiety. Lady Maria began to fancy there might be something in it.

"You and I are brother and sister, Jack," she said, gently. "I know London well and I promise you to go anywhere you wish, and to do any business for you. I fancy I can guess something. When you went to Egypt you left someone behind whom you cared for. You want to see her?"

"I left my wife!"

"Your wife?"

"Oh, Maria!" and the young fellow almost broke down, "if you knew how it has weighed on me. I have not heard anything of her since the first of June. I have written since I got better, and the Sister sent a note or two while I was ill, and no news has come, not a word or a line. She must be dead—my poor little Nan!"

It is probable either of the Miss Hortons on hearing this speech would have flounced out of the room, after telling Jack he ought to be ashamed of himself; but Lady Maria did nothing of the sort. She understood Jack thoroughly, and she did not think he could have cared for anyone vulgar or uneducated. He had most likely lost his heart to some penniless girl whose sole fault was her poverty. Well, he was heir of Horton now, and could afford to marry without a thought of money. Anyway, all Maria's sympathies were with the young couple.

"Please tell me everything, Jack," she said gently. "I can help you so much better if I understand all."

And Jack told her. From the beginning to the end he kept back nothing.

"Nan was as much a lady as my own sisters," he said, hotly. "Her brother was at Wellington with me, and we were chums. I believe it was that which first drew me to her. You see, Maria, I couldn't bear to leave her at Torchester, when we might have such a happy time together in London, and I felt somehow if I died my father would forgive everything and take care of her for my sake, and so I persuaded her to marry me. It was a long time before she consented."

Lady Maria looked thoughtful.

"It was selfish of you, Jack," she said so gently that the blame lost all sting, "to wish her to become perhaps a widow at eighteen; but if the old aunt had lived there would have been no great harm. Shall I tell you what I think?"

"Please."

"For three whole days we all thought you dead. Your name was in the list of killed one Saturday morning, and it was not till Tuesday dear Rex got the message it was a mistake. Of course all our friends soon heard the good news, but I don't think the mistake was ever formally set right in the paper."

"But that would have nothing to do with Nan. She never read the papers. I remember now. Poor Mason was wrapped in my cloak; and the Sister, who had never seen us, changed our names. But what has that to do with Nan?"

"Everything, I fear."

"If only I could go to her," cried Jack, impatiently, "instead of being tied by the leg like this."

"I will go for you, Jack," said Lady Maria; but when she heard his story she looked very grave.

"I am afraid it is of no use."

"Why not?"

"Because I know Mrs. Warburton very well indeed, and a little while ago she engaged a governess who had lived with me. She told me then the story of Miss Dering."

"That was the name. Go on, Maria."

"Dear, there is so little to tell, and it will pain you."

"Fudge!" said Jack, "if she suffered it, do you suppose I can't bear to hear it?"

Lady Maria told Nancy's story as she had heard it from Mrs. Warburton.

"The moment the doctor and his wife came home they sought Miss Dering in every possible way. So far from resenting her deception, they were terribly grieved that she should have been driven from their house in her hour of sorrow. I know for a fact that everything was done both by them and a clergyman at Torchester to trace her, in vain."

"I'd like to strangle that old woman."

"Hush, Jack! Paul Mason was her son, her youngest born. When she heard of his death she never held up her head again. She has been dead now a few weeks."

CHAPTER VI.

The ladies at Horton wondered why their father lingered so long in London; but Jack positively refused to leave it until he had found his wife; and Sir Douglas, who had been taken into confidence by Lady Maria, was the first to see that, apart from pity for poor Nancy the family honour required the mystery to be solved.

Jack was the last of the Hortons, and while Nancy's fate was a secret he could never take a wife and be blessed with children to carry on the old name; so, though from very different motives, the old Baronet was as anxious as his son to find the missing girl."

They never came on any trace of her, though a skilled detective was employed both in London and Torchester.

Advertisements were inserted in all the principal papers, money was spent like water, without the slightest result; and, at last, when November had faded into December, and Sir Douglas longed for his country home, there seemed nothing for it but for the old Baronet to join his daughters at Horton, and poor Jack remain in London as Lady Maria's guest.

She had more patience with him than anyone. Sir Douglas thought privately that—provided Nancy's death were proved indisputably—his heir would be much better free from his lowly wife.

Even Dr. Warburton, kind and pitiful as he was, thought it more merciful to hope that death had taken the poor girl than to think of her alone and friendless in London. Without references she could not have got employment; and as she had hidden herself completely from everyone who had ever known her, how could she procure them?

They had tried everything. Hospitals, missionaries, district visitors, all had been cross-questioned, and in vain.

The theory taken up, both by Lady Maria and Jack, was that Nan must be living in some London court, and keeping existence together by that refuge of the hopeless—plain needlework.

Christmas Day came. What a mockery the signs of joy around him seemed to Jack. Last year he had been at Torchester, and attended service at St. Mark's, just that he might watch Nan's slight figure as she sat at the organ.

His thoughts were very full of his lost wife to-day, and some strange impulse made him go out that afternoon and turn his steps towards Pimlico and enter St. Agatha's, the beautiful church he had been in but once—on his wedding-day.

It stood in a poor district, but the church itself had nothing poor or mean about it. It was as beautiful a building as skill and liberal means could raise to Heaven's glory; and now with all the decorations loving hands had delighted to arrange, it looked a worthy sanctuary for the Prince of Peace.

The door stood open as Jack went in, and impelled by an impulse he could not resist, passed slowly up the aisle to the spot where little more than ten months before he and Nan had been made one. How things had changed since then!

His darling was a lonely fugitive, and he, from a poverty-stricken younger son, had become heir of Horton and its broad acres; and yet the one feeling in the soldier's heart was that he would gladly have given up his prospects of rank and wealth—aye, and his hardly won promotion too—if the girl he loved so well might have been restored to him.

Suddenly the soft full tones of the organ fell upon his ear. He entered one of the long, low pews and sat down to listen. The air recalled his wife, for it was one she had known and loved. Only last Christmas she had played it for the evening voluntary at St. Mark's. The organ here was far superior to that of the little iron church at Torchester, but the full rich melody was the same, and poor Jack, despite his medals and his manhood, felt the tears well up into his eyes as he listened to the subtle harmony and thought of the wife who seemed lost to him for ever.

It seemed a strange time for an organist to choose to practise, and there was no afternoon service at St. Agatha's—he had ascertained that before he ventured to enter—but still the music was a balm to the lonely, aching heart. The very sound of the airs Nan had been wont to play brought a new hope to her husband's heart. She might be earning her living in London as an organist.

He did not know much of such things, but he rather fancied that the production of the musical certificates she had won at school would satisfy those who had to make the appointment as to her respectability, and so she would have needed no other references.

Quick as thought there flashed through his mind the idea of making a list of the churches which employed lady organists, and never resting until he had visited them all. Then he rose up with a start; the last sound of the grand old harmony had died away, and slowly down the aisle there walked a slender, black-robed figure.

She paused at the spot where Jack had stood a few minutes before, as though for her too it had sacred memories. She put back her veil to wipe her eyes, and then—the soldier felt a deep thanksgiving fill his heart. The organist was no stranger to him, but his lost wife!

He waited till she had left the church and then followed her at a distance across a few dreary streets until she stopped at a house in Essex-road and let herself in with a latch-key. Knowing she believed him dead, Jack would not for worlds have spoken to her in the street. He waited perhaps five minutes and

then he knocked at the door by which she had entered.

"I wish to see——" He paused, not knowing by what name Nan was known in this humble house, then he changed his speech. "I have come from St. Agatha's. Can I see the organist?"

"Surely," said the landlady, civilly, "Mrs. Horton has just come. I did think," she added, in an aggrieved tone, "the poor thing would have the evening in peace, as the Vicar had a grand friend to play at all the services to-day."

Jack pushed the door open and entered, then his heart seemed to stand still with wonder and surprise. Nan, his Nan, looking more of a child than ever in her widow's cap, sat by the fire in a low chair, a long white-robed baby in her arms, whom she rocked to and fro gently as in her sweet voice she crooned over it the dear old song, "Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

Jack had taught her that song himself; his second name was Douglas. A mist passed before his eyes. Never had he dreamed of this. Often as he had pictured his meeting with his wife, he had never dreamed of hearing her singing a lullaby to their child.

"Nancy, my Nan!"

She looked up, a strange, startled terror in her beautiful eyes; then, putting the sleeping child on the sofa, she sprang to his side.

"Jack! Jack! Is it true?"

"True that I have come home to you, sweetheart," the soldier said, fondly, "and that I have sought you for four long months till I was almost in despair."

"But I thought you were dead. I saw your name in the list of the slain."

"I know; and a cruel woman drove you from the only home you had because you were too true to break the promise I had selfishly exacted from you to keep our marriage secret, Nan, when I heard that, I felt all your suffering was my fault."

"All would have been well but for Aunt Hannah's death. I think if Mrs. Warburton had been at home she would have trusted me."

"And where have you been all these six months, Nan?"

Nan's story was very simple. She had gone straight to the vicar of St. Agatha's, who had just advertised for an organist, and had begged for the post, showing him the certificates, but begging him not to refer to anyone at Torchester.

Probably the vicar had a kindly heart and pitied the widowed bride, for after he had satisfied himself of her musical ability he made no difficulty. He and his wife had been Nan's kindest friends, even engaging a substitute for six long weeks when, by an unlucky chance, Nan's baby appeared in the world a full month before he was expected.

"He was christened last Sunday," whispered Nan, "and I called him Jack after you. I didn't dare to have Douglas because I knew it was a family name, but I thought no one would notice Jack."

"My dear, Nan," said Captain Horton, cheerfully, "Jack is a capital name for a boy; but when my father and I leave this young shaver to support the dignity of the family 'Sir Jack' will sound peculiar."

"But——"

"I forgot you didn't know. My brother and his little son are dead, and some day—may it be years hence, Nan—you and I must be Sir Douglas and Lady Horton."

Lady Maria received two unexpected guests that Christmas evening, and the next day a letter reached Horton which made Sir Douglas in the seventh heaven, for not only was his "boy" happy again, but an heir had arrived to the honours of the Hortons, and Jack was no longer the last of his name.

Long before Mrs. Horton, her correct title for the present, came home, Freda and Agnes had removed to a house in the neighbourhood, purchased at the time of Reginald's marriage, as they had never contemplated being second to a resident sister-in-law. But Sir Douglas, Captain Horton, Nan, and the future Sir Jack make a very happy family party, and can quite dispense with the presence of the two spinsters.

Lady Maria and her children, the Warburtons, and a grave, middle-aged clergyman from Torchester are all occasional visitors at the Park, where Nan now rules as mistress, and it is the general opinion that young Mrs. Horton is quite as charming as was ever little Nan Daring, where one and all rejoice at the perfect happiness which has come to the girl who once suffered so terribly from A Sad Mistake.

[THE END]

CONSTANT.

—o—

I give you back your word again,
Why should I hold it now?
Why should I see you try in vain
To keep a plighted vow?
And so to-day I say good-bye
Without reproach or tear,
Without one sob or bitter cry
To tell that you were dear.

And just because my love has grown
No whit more weak or cold,
I make no angry plaint or moan
Nor speak of days of old;
But yet I will not have you say,
Because I give no blame,
That if you're weak and false to-day
That I may be the same.

Not so. Together bound are we,
Bound by a golden chain;
No words you speak can set me free,
Nor ease my bitter pain.
You need not think the love that grew
And strengthened day by day
Within my trustful heart for you,
I now can cast away.

And if it chance the world should be
Unfeeling or unkind;
Should fickle fortune turn and flee,
And leave you far behind;
Should all your summer friends depart,
In cold and proud disdain;
My love shall live safe in my heart,
Should you need it again.

PRETTY PENELOPE.

CHAPTER XXXV.

For three days things went on smoothly at Thicket Croft. Marcia continued to improve. She was strangely quiet and even docile, took everything that was ordered for her and behaved, as Dr. Westall said to himself with a grunt, in a perfectly rational manner, for a wonder. The services of Dr. Gregory were dispensed with—she remained under Dr. Westall's care alone. Not by a word or sign did Marcia allude to the conversations that had passed between them relative to her submission; but though she was so calm, and apparently had made up her mind that for the moment, this submission was the only course left her, Dr. Westall was on his guard, and accepted her docility for just what he considered it worth.

All this time Marcia had not once spoken her husband's name nor her cousins. She indeed spoke very very little, but lay or sat propped up by her pillows, staring out through the window, and vouchsafing not the smallest notice to her mother's nervous attempt at conversation, and being seemingly oblivious of the fact that no one, save her maid, her mother, and her doctor, came near her room to enquire after her, or sit with her, or pay her any of those little attentions an invalid as a rule receives. It was on the afternoon of the fourth day that she seemed to wake out of her lethargic calm.

She was alone with her mother; voices from the grounds outside had arisen earlier in the afternoon, proclaiming that Madge Riley had gone driving in Penelope's pony-carriage, having successfully captured Penelope herself and borne her off in triumph.

Mrs. Rochdale was sitting looking out of the window, plunged in her sad regretful thoughts, when Marcia suddenly spoke.

"You have heard from my husband, of course, mother," she said.

Mrs. Rochdale started and rose to her feet in surprise and trepidation; the moment she feared was at hand.

"I have had one letter," she answered, as quietly as she could.

"When?"

"It arrived last week," the mother said.

"Why was I not informed of the fact?"

"You were too ill, Marcia."

"I am ill no longer—show me the letter."

Mrs. Rochdale hesitated, the mother within her could not fail to make her do so. It was not possible Marcia could read the letter—the letter Denis had written—and not suffer terribly, she said to herself.

Marcia translated her mother's silence and hesitation absolutely. She smiled that ghostly disagreeable smile of hers.

"Why don't you give it to me? You don't suppose I am expecting my good husband to write me a love letter, do you? Show it to me. He has no doubt expressed some wishes concerning our future; I must know them without delay."

Mrs. Rochdale left the room in silence, and returned almost immediately with the letter.

Marcia's eyes were gleaming, and her lips were drawn in a thin line; she caught at the letter swiftly and leant a little forward in bed. The sun was setting fast, and the fire was the only clear light. Mrs. Rochdale's heart beat nervously while this reading lasted, and she gave a sigh, almost an audible one, as Marcia put the letter down quietly, and returned to her former position. She had dreaded a scene of excitement, of violence, and of consequent relapse.

"That is just what I expected," Marcia observed, very coolly. "When a person is absolutely in the wrong, then they are most justifiably innocent to themselves." She paused a moment, and then went on: "However I am quite content to let things be in this way. You must write to-night and say I have heard his commands, and the arrangements he proposes to make are absolutely to my liking.

Mrs. Rochdale began to speak in a low, nervous voice. She felt she must make one effort to bring about a better state of affairs.

"Marcia, if you would accept a little word of advice—"

Marcia laughed shortly, but her temper was still calm, even peaceful.

"You know of old I do not care for advice, mother; besides, it comes a little late you see. Denis has made up his mind, so have I; if we are satisfied, I don't think anyone else need worry about us. Will you please write that letter now immediately." Marcia paused a moment. "Tell West to walk with it to the village, and post it herself; not to give it to the other servants, and tell her also she must go over to Lady Susan's and bring away the clothes I left there; I want my red dressing-gown particularly. She had better have a cart or something to drive her there. Tell her to order it to be ready for her by the time she is back from the village; I suppose that will be in about an hour."

"I will go at once." Mrs. Rochdale said. She was so intensely relieved at the way in which Marcia had accepted Denis's letter, she forgot to be surprised at this unusual amount of thought for West's comfort; it was not Marcia's custom to take much trouble.

"When you have done that, you might come back, mother, and tell me all that is going on," Marcia said. She lay still and watched her mother go out of the room. The sun was sunk out of sight now, the grey fingers of twilight were folding the various objects in a mist, the fire had grown into a deep red mass, there was not light enough to see the woman's face resting on the pillows very distinctly, but now and then, as a fitful flame sprang up amid the coals, it caught the gleam of two set eyes; it dwelt on a human countenance almost disfigured out of all likeness to humanity by the evil, the horrible expression upon it. The stillness in the room was absolute—it was broken only by the clear, sighing sound as of someone breathing hard and under great difficulty.

The time of violence, of passionate force, of noise and fury, was gone from Marcia; the more dangerous time was commenced. Silence instead of screams, calmness in place of passion—a time of subtlety and cunning.

Mrs. Rochdale, before writing to Denis, went to see if she could find Dr. Westall. She wanted to tell him how well the difficult moment had been passed. But Dr. Westall was not in the house, he had gone at Philip Gregory's request to——, the nearest town, where a sudden critical case was tasking all the younger medical man's knowledge, and which appealed strongly to Dr. Westall's sympathy and scientific intelligence.

Mrs. Rochdale returned to her daughter's room and read out what she had written to Denis; then, obeying Marcia's request, she sat down and told all the news of the household and the prospective arrangements as far as she knew them. Marcia listened with some interest at first, and then grew weary.

"I think I shall go to sleep. I feel as if I could sleep for hours. I wish you would go downstairs and dine, mother. If I want anything I will ring. West will not be back from Lady Susan's for some time; but I shan't want anything but sleep;" she turned over on her pillow as she spoke, and Mrs. Rochdale stole softly and obediently away. Her heart was touched by the very marked change in Marcia, and it was only natural that hope should rise in place of the despair that had lived with her so persistently the past week.

If Marcia were to grow gentle, calm, reasonable, who knew what might not happen in the future—what might not be forgotten and forgiven. She shut the door behind her and went down the passage. Outside she met West coming to her mistress, she gave the maid Mr. Latimar's message, and added there was no necessity to disturb the invalid again as she wished to go to sleep.

"After that, Mrs. Rochdale went to her own room, and took an hour of well-earned rest, relieved and almost elated by the change wrought in Marcia, she felt another being, and much that had weighed upon her with terrible and overwhelming weight now began to slip away. In her new born hope, as in her sorrow, the thought of Penelope came to her naturally as a kind of comfort and help.

"If there is anything Penelope can do to help to mend this grievous trouble, she will do it. She has her mother's heart over again," she said to herself, with a sigh over her dead sister, and over the girl who was so unlike her own child in every way.

Dr. Westall had put the plain unvarnished truth of all that had happened before Mrs. Rochdale; but she had not grasped the full meaning of things. The story of Marcia's violence and jealousy against her cousin had had so many predecessors.

The mother knew those jealousy fits by heart, she gave no more importance to this last mania than to the others. What distressed her was that Denis's patience had at last given way, and Marcia had undoubtedly seriously jeopardised not only her social position by her unfortunate temper, but her future wealth. Hope, however, springs eternal in the human breast, and, with this afternoon's unexpected revelation of Marcia as a calm, resigned, almost dignified woman, made her mother's heart shake off its despair, and turn again to the consolation of hope.

What part she exactly expected Penelope to take in the matter of healing the rupture between the separated husband and wife she did not specify, even to herself, but somehow the spirit of her dead sister lived again, for Anne Rochdale, in the lovely girl who called her aunt, and, in days long gone by, Marcia's mother had experienced many and many a moment of relief and comfort from her gentle, patient, sweet-natured sister.

It was therefore with a sensation of relief, such as had not come to her for a long time, that Mrs. Rochdale lay back in her chair before her bedroom fire and dropped off to sleep.

* * * * *

Dr. Westall remained several hours in the sick-room of the poor woman to whose sad and critical case the old physician had hastened, giving the full power of his knowledge to the humble patient with far more pleasure than he would given it to a millionaire.

Philip Gregory was unfeignedly grateful to his older and more distinguished colleague for his assistance, and was delighted when Dr. Westall consented to go for an hour to his rooms and partake of some refreshment before returning to Thicket Croft. It was consequently quite late, past ten o'clock indeed, when Penelope's well-loved friend arrived at her house, and Dr. Westall had no sooner set foot in the hall than he scented excitement and alarm.

Penelope, very pale, was trying to soothe her aunt, who was weeping and talking and gesticulating wildly; the servants were gathered in a group, and the doctor's keen eyes immediately caught sight of Marcia's most patient maid, West, in a bonnet and cloak, with a look of fear written on her face. It was Madge Riley who saw Dr. Westall first.

"You have come at last," she exclaimed, in tones of extreme pleasure and relief; then quickly, in answer to his questioning eyes,—

"You find us in a fine commotion; Mrs. Latimar manages to keep us well supplied with sensation. Her last amusement has been to disappear mysteriously; she is not in her room, and is nowhere to be found; in fact, we have searched the house from floor to ceiling—not a trace anywhere."

He had expected something from Marcia's quietness, but not this. Most certainly Dr. Westall stood absolutely silent. Penelope, as she saw him, gave a little cry and ran towards him.

"Oh! dear, uncle George, do come and say something to poor aunt Anne, she is nearly out of her mind. I—I don't know what to do."

Dr. Westall woke out of his amazed silence. He was in a worse temper than he had ever been in his life: to have been fooled and tricked after all by the woman he had imagined he had conquered, for a time at least. Angry, irritated beyond degree as he was, he managed not to betray this; it was the moment for action, not anger.

In less than five minutes the power of his demeanor will had made itself felt in the disorganised household. Mrs. Rochdale was taken up to her room; the servants sorted out and questioned quickly and sternly. By this means, Dr. Westall soon learnt all there was to know. He heard of West's errand to the village, of Marcia's commands not to be disturbed; of her further commands that her maid was to go over to Lady Susan's to fetch her clothes; of her desire her mother should dine downstairs; of how all these commands had been carried out with the exception of West's drive to Lady Susan Vereshoyle's house.

The maid had hastened to the village to post Mrs. Rochdale's letter, ordering a cart to be in readiness for her by the time she came back. On her return from the post, however, the cart was not to be seen. West, imagining the groom was perhaps having a meal before starting, went into the servant's hall and had some tea, then sallied out again as time was going on, and she dreaded the effect on her mistress should she be very late in returning from Lady Susan's. While waiting she learnt from the stables that the cart had been ready and started away with someone from the house before she had got back from the village; and while West was debating what she had better do, getting nervous at apprehension of Marcia's anger, the cart returned, bringing the information that it had conveyed a lady in a long fur cloak to the railway station, and that she had entered the station and evidently gone off by train.

There was no need to cross-question the servant's as to the identity of the lady. It was absolutely clear that the groom's companion on the drive had been no other than Mrs. Latimar, and that by a clever series of commands she had worked events to suit her own purpose, which purpose Dr. Westall immediately fathomed.

"She has gone to Latimar," he said tersely. He had gathered from Mrs. Rochdale's incoherent words that Marcia had read Denis's letter and had accepted it quite calmly, seemingly resigned at the tone of its contents; in proof of which statement Mrs. Rochdale quoted the answer she had written to Denis, which West had been sent to post.

The woman's cunning was revealed to the physician at every turn.

"She has gone to Latimar," he said, and his face was very stern, "and I must go after her," he added, deliberately.

Neither Penelope nor Madge made any protest to this; there was something in his manner that taught them how seriously he regarded Marcia's last act of folly and madness. The will of the woman was supreme; what it must have cost her to have dressed herself first, and then have schemed to leave her room unnoticed. Her will was indeed extraordinary but what of her physical strength?

"Useless to go by train. I must drive, start and start at once. It is barely twelve miles if we go the Stevenstone road," Dr. Westall said. "Penelope, I think I shall take your ponies, they will cover the distance sooner than a cob. Have it sent round at once. And West, get something to eat as quickly as you can; you must come with me."

Penelope wreathed her arms about the old man's neck, resting her soft cheek against his grisly beard.

"Dear Uncle George," she said, in her pretty tender voice, "how good you are! and you must be so tired. You look worn out."

"I am all right—mustn't be tired with the work I have got before me. Now, Madge just see this child goes to bed at once—at once, no sitting up with your aunt or any other nonsense, you understand, Penelope."

His voice was gruff, but his eyes were tender; he held the girl in his arms a little longer, then watched Madge take her away.

His heart and brain were in a turmoil of apprehension as to what might not happen at Latimar Court. He knew Marcia's mission; it was to force herself into her husband's presence, taunt, insult, revile him, and show him that no matter what lines he might lay down, she would go her own way to the end—she would not give him peace from her presence or allow him to forget for a moment she was his wife.

"The cunning mood is the more dangerous," said Dr. Westall to himself, as he drove Penelope's well-matched ponies through the lanes in the cold grey spring night-time, with poor West trembling and weary beside him.

It was a long drive, but it was necessary, as the doctor had said; for there would have been no train to Stevenstone till the morning had been well advanced, and by this hour, midnight, Marcia had in all probability arrived at Latimar Court; unless her false strength, built up of will, passion, and excitement, had given way, and she was lying helpless and prostrate in some place.

The church clock was striking half past two as the ponies rattled through the little village that had been Penelope's home for so long, and where those bright mischievous sunny days of her girlhood had been passed.

The big gates of Latimar Court were open, the ponies flew up the avenue. At the entrance there was someone waiting, evidently in expectation. It was Denis Latimar's man; he gave an exclamation of intense surprise as he saw who had arrived.

"We sent for Dr. Goodfellow. We did not know you were back, sir."

"Mrs. Latimar is here?" Dr. Westall asked, briefly, though he knew she was before he asked.

"She arrived very late, sir, about nine thirty. She is very ill, sir, I am afraid," the man added; his whole manner denoted intense anxiety. "We've done what we could; but we couldn't get no doctor, sir. I sent all round, but they was all out. It must be Providence as sent you to us, sir."

"Providence first and my own brain afterwards," Dr. Westall said, grimly.

He commended poor West to the valet's care, and gave orders that the ponies were to be well rubbed down; he had driven them for all they were worth.

As he crossed the hall a door opened and Denis came out of a room. He took his old friend's hands, he could not speak at first. He struggled with his emotion, and then broke down, falling into one of the big cane chairs and bowing his head on his hands as a stout tree bends beneath the fierceness of a gale.

"It is awful—awful!" he muttered. "I can not bear it. She—she cursed me, Westall. I shall have that curse with me always—always. I have tried to plead with her. I have asked her forgiveness if I have wronged her. I have done all——" he broke off.

"Do you need to tell this to me, Denis?" the older man said. "Rouse yourself, shake off this horror. She is mad, you know, she does not know what she says. What is her curse? the frenzy of a mad woman. Rouse yourself; I will go to her if there is any trace of humanity left in her heart."

Denis lifted his ashen face from his hands.

"Do you not understand? She will never speak again. She is dead, Westall—dead with a curse in her heart for me—a curse on her lips. She is dead!"

Dr. Westall let his hands fall on the young man's shoulder.

"Poor fellow," he said, in his gentlest tone, then lifting his other hand he took his felt hat from his grey head.

"May God have mercy on her troubled soul, forgive her her trespasses and give her peace," he said, and with that he left the living to battle with his mental agony while he went to look his last on all that remained of one who by sheer wanton wickedness had absolutely wrecked her own young life and brought misery and unhappiness to all about her.

CHAPTER XXXVI., AND LAST.

London was looking its very best; as yet the dirt and dust had not managed to spoil the vivid green of the trees. The sun was obligingly warm, the parks were fragrant with lilac, and with their gaily-coloured flowerbeds.

The streets were thronged with smart people and smart carriages, with horses furbished and made brilliant for the season; the windows of the houses boasted spotless blinds, which defied the demon fog in safety. About all and everything there was the undoubted glamour and pleasure of early summer—of life's most sunny time, when, however light the purse may be, the heart goes lightly too, from sheer satisfaction and pleasure in living.

Before one of the fashionable hotels in Piccadilly, on a particularly delicious morning, a smart victoria came to a stop, and a young lady, with good health and good looks beaming from her, alighted and entered the hall, dismissing the carriage for half an hour.

"Miss Desborough has the same rooms that she had last time?" she inquired. "Oh! then I can find my way, she is expecting me."

In a fever of delight and impatience Madge De Burgh ran up the stairs in a most undignified fashion, tapped sharply at a door, and then burst in upon a girl sitting writing hard at a table.

"Penelope, my beloved!" she cried.

"Madge!" Penelope's face was suddenly illuminated.

"How good of you to come so soon! Why, you have hardly had time to read my letter."

"Got it first thing this morning; I was so delighted. I rushed off. Harold said I was like a wild woman. I could not eat any breakfast; I could do nothing till I saw you—you dear thing. Let me look at you, Pen. Um—yes—you are certainly better, though not what you ought to look. I am overjoyed you are away from the sick-nursing; you have been an angel to stay with Mrs. Rochdale all this time."

"Poor aunt Anne!" Penelope said, sadly. "I thought she would not live through the winter. You would hardly know her, she is so changed, Madge; grown quite old and her hair is quite grey."

"I am sorry," Madge said, gently. But she was not there to talk on sad things; Penelope had had more than enough of them, Mrs. De Burgh declared to herself.

"I don't know where to begin, I feel I have so much to say to you, Penelope. How long is it since we met? a century it seems to me. You know Harold is quite jealous of you; he says I think far more about you than I do about him. How is Dr. Westall? What is this news about Lucy's baby? Are you really going to have charge of it? But, oh! Penelope, you don't mean you are going to leave town immediately? you can't, my dear; you shan't; having once got you up here, I am going to keep you. Where are your clothes? let us pack them at once!"

Penelope laughed almost with a touch of her old brightness.

"Dear Madge, you are as whirlwindy as ever; but, you see, I can't stay with you for the moment, baby must go to the sea. She is such an angel, you will love her!"

"I shall not love her if she takes you away," observed Mrs. De Burgh tragically; all the same she lost her heart immediately to the fairy-like little creature who was brought in for inspection, clinging to her dusky picturesque ayah and looking like a spirit from another world.

"Lucy has nearly broken her heart parting with her; but I think she is right, the little one is so delicate. Is she not an angel, Madge."

Madge enthusiastically agreed, and when she saw what pleasure the tiny creature gave to her friend, she rejoiced in its arrival.

"Who goes with you to the sea, and where are you going?" she asked, as the child and nurse disappeared.

"To Waveton," Penelope was busying herself tidying the papers on the table, she was angry with herself for that sudden trouble in her hands, and that quick rush of blood to her face. Would she never grow strong enough to speak even a simple word like that without betraying how much it cost her to do so? "Lucy has chosen the place subservient, of course, to Dr. Westall's consent, as Uncle George declares it is the finest air in the world, I suppose we are right to go there."

"Let me see," Madge said, apparently examining some pictures, in reality looking keenly at Penelope, and marvelling as she did so at the unusual loveliness of the girl, "let me see, you were there two or three years ago weren't you, Pen?"

Penelope said, "Yes" very quietly, "it is a pretty place," she added, "my dear dead mother was so happy there!"

"I remember she told me," Madge said, absently.

She was wondering how she could possibly bring in the name that was hovering on her lips. She curbed her inclination for the moment, and for the next quarter of an hour the two friends discussed subjects of mutual interest. There was so much they had to discuss; it was nearly three months since they had met, and since then Harold De Burgh had been offered and had accepted a very rich living in London, and Madge was settled in a charming house with her husband whom she adored, and her year-old baby.

"Daisy is having a splendid time over in Ireland," she said, as the conversation waned a little, and then an idea came to Madge. "She told me in her last she had met Sir Rossland Bryant several times. Do you intend to make that poor man happy at last, Penelope?"

Penelope rose and walked to the window.

"I shall never marry," she said, in a low voice. "Please don't let us discuss that subject, Madge."

"Why not?" Mrs. De Burgh said, ruthlessly. "It is a subject that is constantly being discussed by others. You are a mystery, you know, Pen—beautiful, sweet, rich, and yet as cold and hard as an icicle, according to your various disappointed suitors."

"I did not know that I counted them by dozens," Penelope said, with a very nervous laugh; she turned and walked back to the table. "Let us change the subject. No, Madge, dear," imploringly, as she read the expression in her friend's eyes, "no, do not speak of it, I cannot——"

"Penelope, I must," Madge answered, firmly. "If you refuse to marry Rossland Bryant again and again, if you are so cold to others, there is but one reason: that you have no heart to give to these men, that your heart was given long long ago to one whom you know to be true, faithful, good—everything a man should be. Pen, darling, I would not do anything to hurt you, you know it, but I can't stand by and see you wreck two lives for no earthly reason. Be true to your love; let your heart speak. Denis has been more than patient; he has waited two years—time enough for all that was to be forgotten."

"I shall never forget," Penelope cried, suddenly. "For me, Marois lives always—stands always before my eyes; shutting out the very sunlight itself. Madge, say no more, never, never speak of him again. You don't know what suffering you give me—useless, useless suffering, for nothing can be altered, nothing forgotten. If you had gone through such an experience as I did; if you had heard her words—her cruel, cruel words! Oh! Madge, I entreat you, do not speak of this any more."

Madge was silent for a moment, her heart was deeply touched; but she had more than this feeling working in her breast, she had the memory of a man before her eyes—a man hungering, yearning for a word of hope, for some reward after his patience, some joy after all his pain—a man who lived only by his love and for his love.

"I promised Denis I would do my best, and will," she said to herself, and forthwith in very gentle tones she tried to plead the cause of one whom she knew right well was dearer to Penelope than her own life.

"In this world, dear," Madge said quietly, "it is our duty not to live entirely for ourselves, we must think of others; we must put ourselves in the background sometimes, lest we grow too selfish. There comes a mood over us sometimes when our own pain is sweeter to us than another's pleasure; it is a morbid unhealthy frame of mind, and it should be rooted out at once, lest it grow and grow and at last get the better of us altogether, this is your case Pen. You are hugging your own sorrow, forgetting the terrible pain and disappointment you are giving another. Forgive me for preaching, darling I am a parson's wife and so I am privileged, you know; but I am so eager

[PENELOPE AND DENIS WALKED DOWN TO THE EDGE OF THE WAVES, WHILE DR. WESTALL LAY AND WATCHED THEM.]

to see you happy—I know you would be so happy with Denis. Are you a woman to be condemned for ever to sick-nursing and solitude; you used to be a sunbeam—what are you now? Penelope, I entreat you, do heed what I am saying, shake off those morbid thoughts and fears; be yourself. Remember, in sending Denis away finally from you—you may drive——"

"Oh! hush!—hush!" Penelope said. She stood with her hands pressed over her eyes. Every word Madge had uttered burned in her heart; the wisdom, the truth of them came to her as they had never come before. She was silent so long, Madge was a little frightened lest her temerity should have made the girl angry; but as the hands fell down at last and Penelope's loveliness was revealed, she read without any difficulty that she had done well—spoken, perhaps, in the very nick of time, and so brought happiness to two grand natures and true hearts.

* * * * *

"Wargton is a wonderful place," Dr. Westall said. He was lying full length on the beach with the little child from India seated on his chest, laughing gleefully into his deep-set kindly eyes. "One can positively see the health grow on this baby."

"She certainly does look better. I must have her picture taken and sent to Lucy—poor Lucy, she does miss her!"

"Is that a letter from her?" the doctor inquired.

"No! one from Mrs. Warriner; she tells me Philip Gregory is engaged and will be married immediately."

"Nice young fellow, got his brain in the right place!" Dr. Westall stared at the baby above him, and then at the ayah, seated a little way apart, sewing the while she crooned some Eastern lullaby to herself.

"And who is that from?" he asked as he turned his eyes on the girl sitting close beside him.

"This letter? Oh that, is from aunt Anne—her rheumatism——"

"I know all about Mrs. Rochdale's rheumatism, thank you," was Dr. Westall's somewhat rude remark. "I did not mean that letter: I meant that!" pointing to a third envelope. "As I live, I believe it is from that chap, Denis!"

"Well!" inquired Penelope, with all her old defiant impertinence, "what if it is?"

"Another letter! Ye Gods! and you had two yesterday and a telegram, and he is coming down here this morning as fast as the train can bring him!"

"You are a very nasty old man!" Penelope declared, throwing a pebble at him; "isn't he baby? I believe you are jealous because no one writes to you!"

"I am jealous, furiously. Pen, will you forget your old uncle George when you are mistress of Latimar Court?"

"Now, for that," Penelope said, and she roused herself to deal some terrible punishment; but at that moment a whistle sounded out clear behind them, and her face grew suddenly rosy in its beauty.

"I think that is Denis," she, said gathering up her letters.

"Think—is a good guess." Dr. Westall remarked, sententiously. "Now run along and kiss him."

"Uncle George, you are——"

"What is he, Pen?" inquired Denis's voice. Denis's voice of three years before, full, hearty, joyous, happy.

"He is a miserable man!" Penelope said, with an attempt at a withering glance from her beautiful blue eyes; but with her hand in that strong one, with the joy of her dear one's presence, with the illimitable happiness come to her at last. Penelope could not even pretend to be anything but what her smiling lips and eyes proclaimed her to be.

They walked by-and-by, she and Denis, down to the edge of the waves. Dr. Westall lay and watched them under his bushy eyebrows.

"Thank Heaven!" he muttered to himself as his eyes rested on Penelope's love-illumined face. "Thank Heaven, I can see her happy at last."

They stood by the small white-frothed rippling waves, and their hands clung together, and their eyes spoke all that there was to say. They were silent as yet in their great happiness; but with such deep, such earnest love as lived between these two, silence was more eloquent than speech.

They loved, they had loved in a time of darkest misery—now the sunshine of the greatest earthly bliss was shining before them. They would live on through all the changes a mortal life can bring, through shadow perchance as though sunshine, strong in their mutual faith, grateful to their last hour for the good that had been vouchsafed them; forgetting their past sorrow in their ever present happiness.

[THE END.]

DR. LAUDER BRUNTON declares that cold water is a valuable stimulant to many if not all people. It's action on the heart is more stimulating than brandy. His own experience is that sipping half a wineglass of cold water will raise his pulse from seventy-six to over a hundred.

THERE is a new invention concerning political life. It is a machine by which the art of polling is confined to the pressing of a knob which registers a vote for the candidate whose name is on it. This has been extensively used in municipal elections in New York State, and has the decided advantage of minimising the possibilities of cranks and would-be funny people who delight in making light of a serious matter.

["I WANT YOU FOR MY WIFE, HILDRED!" SAID DAVID; "TO BE WITH ME FOR ALWAYS."]

HILDRED ELSINORE.

CHAPTER V.

THE general verdict at Copsleigh was in Guy Bertram's favour. Even those who had most loudly condemned Lady Tempest's will admitted that the new master of the Mere seemed worthy of his good fortune.

He made not the least attempt to shut himself up or live in dreary retirement. He received everyone who called on him with frank cordiality, and returned their visits in due course.

He made no difference between the wealthy county families who came over from the other side of Blankhampton, the nearest town of importance, and the doctor, clergyman, and lawyer who made up the upper ten of Copsleigh; he was not in the least arrogant or set up by his unlooked-for prosperity.

If his visitors mentioned Lady Tempest and condemned her ambition, he said, simply, he did not care to speak evil of the dead.

If anyone inquired as to his travels he told them he had wandered about from one country to another, never staying long in any; and that now he was back in England he felt almost like a stranger; and then he would give the same heavy sigh which had so touched Mr. West's heart, and which was equally effectual with the ladies of Copsleigh, who told their husbands that it was plain Mr. Bertram's heart was buried in Blanche Tempest's grave, and such constancy was beautiful to witness in these degenerate days.

A complete staff of servants had been engaged; and Guy made the Jolliffes happy by asking them to remain in their old posts of butler and housekeeper.

"I am likely to be a good deal away from home," he told the old couple, and I should like to feel the Mere was in such trustworthy care as yours.

He won golden opinions from the poor as well as the rich. He was the largest landowner for miles, and he soon showed he meant to be a model one, for orders were given for repairs on a liberal scale to all cottages in need of them. The farmers found any reasonable request for improvement promptly granted.

The Rev. George Smith discovered Mr. Bertram was always ready with subscriptions for any deserving charity, and openly congratulated himself on having such a generous parishioner as the new Squire.

"I assure you, Ada, Mr. Bertram is the most open-hearted man I ever met. I have only to tell him of any need and his purse is ready."

Mrs. Smith smiled. She was a little woman reaching barely to her husband's shoulder; but she had more brains than her acquaintance ever suspected. A loving loyal-hearted wife she never let any one guess how far she was the intellectual superior of the big kindly-natured man she had married.

Mrs. Smith had been an intimate friend of Blanche Tempest—indeed, the two were the same age, and had been playmates from childhood ever since the Tempests bought the Mere and came to Copsleigh where Ada's father was then Vicar.

Ada's romance had run smoothly. She married her father's curate; Lady Tempest gave him the living on his Vicar's death, and Ada lived on in the old house where she had been born. But though all her life had been spent at Copsleigh, except a month's holiday every summer, and two years at a finishing school, though her husband was far too poor for his wife to go much into fashionable society, yet Mrs. Smith was keener sighted than many people who prided themselves on their knowledge of the world; and though she never breathed the fact to any human creature, though she would not breathe a hint of it even to her husband, she did not like Mr. Bertram.

To this clever little woman Guy Bertram seemed pretentious and deceitful. Ada had nursed Blanche Tempest in her last illness, and had listened to her loving praise of the man from whom her mother's ambition had parted her; and Mrs. Smith felt certain of two things—Blanche's lover, as he had been then, would never have accepted aught at her mother's hands, and the Guy Bertram of that old romance would not have despoiled the orphan by taking possession of all that by right belonged to the child of Lucy Elsinore, Blanche's elder sister.

"I suppose men deteriorate," thought the Vicar's wife, "knocking about the world they can't keep any fine feelings; but if this is the man Blanche worshipped, either, poor child, she was deceived in him from the first, or he has grown careless and worldly since her death. Generous, indeed! I wonder George can be so taken in. Mr. Bertram is making a desperate bid for popularity. It quite irritates me to hear people talk of his heart being buried in Blanche's grave. I don't believe he has so much as been near the spot where the poor child sleeps! Generous, indeed! why, if he'd a spark of generosity about him he'd do something for poor Mrs. Elsinore's children. It's my belief he just trades upon people's love of romance, and makes capital of his grief!"

But Mrs. Smith was not an influential person, and as she kept her opinion of him religiously to herself, it mattered little to Guy Bertram that she disapproved of him.

He knew that he had won golden opinions from all the country round; that he bid fair to be the most popular man in Blankshire. He had a splendid home, and a princely income; no one to interfere with him, no poor relations to make claims on him; surely he ought to have been a happy man. Only as the autumn days faded the master of the Mere wearied of the simple life of country gentleman, and seemed seized with a sudden fit of restlessness.

"I shall never settle down, I'm afraid," he

said to Captain Trefusis, a young officer whose regiment was stationed at Blankhampton, and whose "people" were near neighbours to the Mere. "I suppose when a man has knocked about the world as much as I have, it gives him a taste for roving."

Lionel Trefusis was a good half-dozen years younger than the millionaire, but he had taken a genuine liking for him, and spoke his mind frankly,—

"You'll have to marry, Bertram. You'll never feel settled till you do."

They had been playing billiards. Guy dropped his cue abruptly, and asked,—

"Why do people propose matrimony as a panacea for all troubles? I should like to know."

"Well," answered Hugh Trefusis, slowly, "when a man has given hostages to fortune he doesn't, as a rule, quarrel with the good things fate sends to him, and it seems to me that's what you are doing now."

"I haven't quarrelled with the Mere," protested Mr. Bertram. "It's awfully dull, and the old place gives me the blues, but I don't pretend for a moment I'm not glad to own it."

The young officer looked into the fire as though he could read some story written there. He remembered Blanche Tempest as a very vision of beauty. It might well be that this man, having lost her, cared for nothing else.

"You should get some old friends down to stay with you," he said, cheerfully, "this place is too big for one lonely individual."

"But I don't possess such a thing as an old friend. Poor people don't indulge in such luxuries, and I was as poor as a church mouse till last August."

"Why, we heard the lawyers only discovered you through an old friend, a man who had been half over the world with you, and shared your perils in the bush, and all that sort of thing. Wasn't it true?"

"Williams and West offered fifty pounds reward for my address,' returned Bertram; "it was quite unnecessary, but——"

"Well, as with the reward it took them months to find you, I don't know how they would have fared without it," said the Captain, thoughtfully, "and from such a fortune as yours you needn't grudge a trifle like fifty pounds."

"I shouldn't have grudged five hundred; but I'd rather it had gone into a stranger's pocket. Claude Maitland and I were friends once—close friends—I hadn't a secret from him in the world; and how do you think he recompensed my trust?"

Trefusis shook his head.

"I've no idea. Played you false, I imagine, from your manner."

"Aye. We were on an expedition up-country, and we got lost in the bush—you know what that means?"

"Pretty fair. You lost your way in some trackless waste, and were a prey to the terrors of hunger and the ravages of wild beasts."

"It seemed certain death for us both. We had come to our last crumb, our last bottle of water. We took it in turns to sleep and watch, for we dared not risk being surprised by the beasts of prey. I had more money than Maitland. I carried it in a canvas bag in my breast-pocket; but if I was better off in gold, he had stronger health. The anxiety and exposure, the want and suspense told on me. They only seemed to give him a pleasurable excitement.

"It was night. We had come, as I tell you, to our last provisions. It seemed certain the next day must see us perish unless we could find the track or fall in with friendly travellers. I took the first turn at sleeping. Maitland always preferred to watch the earlier part of the night. He said he could not bear to be awake in the dawn.

"Generally he called me about three. This night I slept heavily and woke of my own accord when the day was far advanced. My comrade was missing. He had taken the last bottle of water, the last crust of bread. He had taken my little store of gold. All he could lay hands on he had carried off, leaving me in the desert to die alone."

Trefusis removed his cigar and asked, gravely,—

"Are you sure he was not overpowered by tramps and robbed himself?"

"I am quite sure. I met some travelling natives that very day. They played the part of good Samaritan, and helped me back to the beaten track. They fed me and saved my life. When I got down to the township the first news I heard was that Maitland had reported me as dead, and sailed for England, his passage paid with my money."

"It looks black against him."

"Aye, he was down on his luck I expect when he saw Williams and West's advertisement for my address. How he came to know it I have no idea; but he must have tracked me out, for he gave them the name of the quiet street in Brixton where I lodged. He gave all the information they had stipulated for, and they paid him fifty pounds. All I begged was that I might not be asked to meet him face to face."

"I seem to know the name. Didn't he write for the *Portarlington Review*?"

"Yes. He was a clever fellow; but I shall never forgive him for destroying my belief in human nature. Old friends, indeed! if Claude Maitland is a specimen of such, I'd rather be without any."

But Hugh Trefusis had a generous mind, and he contrived to make an excuse even for this.

"Are you quite sure he didn't mean this as a kind of 'make up?' This putting the lawyers into communication with you and leading to your having your own may have seemed to him as a kind of atonement."

"I wish I could think so."

"I suppose you did not see him?"

"No. The lawyers wished it, but I firmly refused. I told them that even if my inheritance depended on it I would not meet Claude Maitland face to face."

"What has become of him?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. When he's spent the fifty pounds he'll probably go to ruin headlong."

One of the new servants came in now—a well-trained footman—he seemed quite conscious his errand was not in the proper routine of the establishment.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but there's a gentleman here who particularly wishes to see you. He says he's come from London on purpose."

This thought passed through the mind of Hugh Trefusis. Could this stranger be Claude Maitland?

Mr. Bertram lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"A *gentleman*, Charles?"

"Yes, sir," said the astute domestic, "and a very pleasant-spoken one. He said he had not the pleasure of knowing you; but that his business was important."

"Tell him I never see anyone unless I know their name."

The footman returned in two minutes. He carried a card on which was inscribed

JAMES TUCKER, M.D.,
Rosemont,
Fulham.

While underneath had been added hastily in pencil, "On a matter of life and death."

Guy Bertram glanced at Captain Trefusis.

"I never heard the name in my life. Will you see me through with it?" then, as Trefusis nodded, "Show Dr. Tucker in here, Charles."

Hugh Trefusis thought he had never seen a more taking face than that of the new comer. Guy Bertram pointed to a seat civilly enough, but there was a shade of hauteur in his voice, as he said,—

"I did not like to refuse to see you after your message, but I have not the least idea to what I owe the honour of your visit."

Dr. Tucker resented the tone, and went straight to the point at once.

"I am here to ask you to do a deed of mercy. No!" as Bertram rather ostentatiously took out his purse. "Gold won't help me, though of course that remedy occurs first to a millionaire. I want you to give me Claud Maitland's address."

Coming on their late conversation this request was passing strange.

"I have no idea of Mr. Maitland's whereabouts," said Bertram, rather sullily, "I have not seen him since he was in Australia."

Dr. Tucker looked at him keenly. He was conscious that he had failed altogether to secure the millionaire's sympathy.

"Let me tell you my story," he said, gravely, "Among my patients is a young girl, the only child of a widow who lets lodgings in Fulham. Last June, Claude Maitland became her tenant. Mrs. Robson had no idea of any intimacy between him and her daughter, till one day in August he disappeared."

"Men of Maitland's Bohemian tastes are given to disappear," said Bertram, slowly, "I fancy the widow is well rid of him."

"Let me finish. He left one morning saying he should be home that night but might be late. Money, clothes, books, he left untouched: from that hour to this nothing has been heard of him."

"But why come to me? I am not Claud Maitland's keeper."

"Mrs. Robson has been known to me for years; she consulted me as to her lodger's disappearance. Her daughter came in suddenly, while we were talking, and accused herself of being Maitland's destroyer. It seems she was engaged to him secretly, and, seeing the advertisement for your address, she persuaded him to apply for the reward."

Guy Bertram bowed.

"I still fail to see my part in the affair, sir."

Hugh Trefusis could not admire his friend now. However much Mr. Bertram had been wronged by Maitland, he might have felt sorry for the poor girl.

"Sir," said the doctor, simply, "this poor child—she is only eighteen—firmly believes her lover has met with his death at your hands. Foolish and unfounded as the fancy is, it has laid her on a bed of sickness. Poor little Nan is suffering from a severe attack of brain fever. When the crisis in the disease comes, when she recovers consciousness, I know her first cry will be for her lover. If we cannot produce Maitland, or satisfy her mind about him, she will die. No human skill can save her."

There was no apathy in Bertram's manner now. Perhaps the thought of his own love, Blanche Tempest, who had surely died for love of him, made him pitiful. His voice was full of feeling as he turned to Dr. Tucker, and said,—

"Heaven knows I would help you if I could but the poor girl's diseased fancy is on a wrong track: I have never set eyes on Maitland since I returned to England."

Trefusis interposed.

"If they were engaged, surely she must have known Maitland's friends, and some of them could help you."

"They were engaged, but so secretly that her own mother never suspected it. He was in Mrs. Robson's house two months, and he never had a visitor, never received a single letter. He seems to have been an utter mystery. We have nothing to guide us but the poor child's heart-broken cry that she 'sent him to his death,' and his 'false friend, Guy Bertram' had killed him. The name recalled the advertisement to me, and I went to see Messrs. Williams and West. I will not say they sent me here, indeed they dissuaded me from coming, saying Mr. Bertram was not on friendly terms with the missing man; but," the good doctor's voice faltered, "you see, I have known little Nan from her childhood, and I could not let her die without an effort

to save her. I trusted you, sir," he bowed to Bertram, "to be too generous to resent the poor girl's delirious fancy, and I came to crave your help."

"And you should have it willingly," cried Bertram, "if I could give it you; but I assure you, on my honour, I have told you the truth, I know nothing of this man."

"It was the twenty-ninth of August that he left Fulham," said the doctor, speaking very slowly; "from that day there is no clue to his fate. He went out early, and never returned."

"I can account for every moment of my time on the twenty-ninth of August," said Guy Bertram, calmly. "I called on Messrs. Williams and West by appointment at eleven o'clock, and from that hour they never lost sight of me. The senior partner went with me to the bank, and then accompanied me down here."

Dr. Tucker rose to go.

"I have to thank you for your courtesy, sir," he said, simply. "I trust you forgive my intrusion. Maitland is probably a consummate scoundrel; but, you see, that poor child believes in him, and for her sake I'd give a great deal to find him."

"I hope you may succeed," said Bertram, rather stiffly; "and to show you I bear no malice for Miss Robson's rather harsh suspicions of myself, if there is any other sort of help she needs, such as pecuniary aid, I assure you you have only to let me know."

Dr. Tucker shook his head.

"Money won't heal a broken heart, Mr. Bertram," he said, simply; and then without another word he went out into the gathering gloom of the October afternoon.

"Well," he said, thinking aloud as he walked down the avenue, "I daresay Maitland is an out-and-out bad one; but if that young man I've just left is a type of an honourable, true-hearted gentleman, hang me if I dont prefer the other sort. Money, indeed, to heal Nan's broken heart, and make her forget her lover. Money to a girl who is too ill to realise anything except that she's lost her lover. Well, I suppose, Mr. Bertram, you thought yourself very generous and charitable; but I'd have been better pleased if you'd not hurled your gold at my head quite so offensively."

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Elsinore did not forget his promise to Hildred; but for some time he had little chance of fulfilling it. Very soon after Lord Netherton's brief visit to the Rectory an epidemic broke out in the parish, and for some time drove away all thoughts of aught else.

It was a kind of low, aguish fever, and it gained a terrible hold in the damp, low-lying village. Hardly a house escaped. There were more deaths than Mr. Elsinore ever remembered since he came to Netherton, and convalescence was a trying time, for the weak, prostrated invalids required all sorts of nourishment to set them on their legs again, and it was not easy to procure, though Mrs. Hill, obeying her absent master's orders, served out a continuous stream of strong beef tea and rich new milk to all who needed such comforts.

The illness had fallen heaviest on the Rectory. Mrs. Elsinore escaped entirely, but her husband and every one of the children suffered in turn.

Perhaps the rigid economy of the Rectory table prevented their having any reserve strength to fall back upon. Perhaps the doctor's prescriptions could not all be carried out for want of means; anyway, the whole family emerged from their illness a white-faced tottering group, who seemed to have, as Mrs. Gibson put it, no strength left in them, and who ought—she declared to Mrs. Elsinore—to eat and drink as much nourishment as ever could be poured down their throats.

The Rector's wife had her pride; though she was not so sensitive as her husband she would not have minded hinting to Lord Netherton how much they needed a larger income; but she would have died rather than tell Mrs. Gibson that even such things as new-laid eggs and beef-tea were beyond her purse, and that her girls had as much need of the charity dispensed from the Castle as the cottagers.

But Mrs. Gibson did not require telling; she guessed pretty well how things were, and many a dainty found its way down to the Rectory from the Manor Farm to tempt the appetites of the convalescents.

Mr. Gibson was a man of few words, but he was as open-handed as his wife, and would have been the last person to object to her liberality; besides, he liked the Elsinores, and though he did prefer Scotch reels to any other sort of music, he had a great regard for pretty, dreamy Hildred.

The Gibson's had no daughters of their own. Three sons represented the family at the Manor Farm, and of these David, the eldest, had lately migrated to a home of his own. The Highlands joined on to his father's land, and it had always been the custom for the two farms to be held by the same family.

"Davey 'll be wanting a wife now," his mother said when her first-born took possession of his new quarters; and perhaps, in her heart, she thought that had Martha Elsinore only been a little older, she would have suited the young farmer as a help mate.

But Mrs. Gibson was to be undeceived. One evening, when the fever had decreased its virulence, and only a few cases lingered in Little Netherton, David came abruptly into the keeping-room, where his mother sat alone, and asked her,—

"Have you been to the Rectory lately?"

"I went round this afternoon. Mr. Elsinore looked as well as ever, but the girls are very pulled down."

Davey was a fine young fellow of four-and-twenty; his honest face had a strained, anxious look as he went on,—

"They say in the village she's dying! Mother, tell me it isn't true? It can't be true—or there'd be no mercy above."

"It's not so bad as that, Davey lad. They've had the fever sore enough, but they'll pull through with care. I've half a mind to get Martha here and nurse her up a bit myself."

"Mrs. Elsinore 'll see to her," said the young man, carelessly; "but if you had Hildred, mother?"

"Hildred!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, bewildered. "Why should I trouble about her?"

"For my sake," answered David. "Mother, haven't you guessed my secret? I've loved Hildred Elsinore ever since she was a little maid in white frocks and pinafores. She's far too good for me, but yet I've never thought of anyone else—I never can."

"David," cried Mrs. Gibson in dismay, "she's a pretty creature, but she'll never make a useful wife. Her own mother admits she's but feckless. She'd never learn to make the butter, and look after the young chickens."

"But if I worked a bit harder, mother, maybe I could pay someone else to do that; it's Hildred I want, not the work I might get out of her. If only I could see her about the house, and know she was mine, I don't think I'd have aught left to wish for."

Mrs. Gibson was a little mollified by the thought that with such a daughter-in-law as Hildred Elsinore, she would certainly reign supreme in domestic matters at Highlands as well as at the Manor Farm.

She need fear no opposition from gentle, soft-eyed Hildred. She was a pretty creature too; and David was well off, and could, as he expressed it, afford a lady-wife.

"What will your father say?" demanded the mother, after a long pause.

"I've spoken to him; he said he'd not go against it if you were for it. Mother, I'd not marry against your wishes. Hildred's proud; she'd not come unless she thought she was welcome, and I'd not bring her to be a cause of strife."

"They're as poor as poor can be," declared Mrs. Gibson. "None of those girls 'll ever have a penny; and, oh! I wish it had been Martha!"

"Martha's well enough; but Dreda's the only girl I ever wanted to see always by me. She's not extravagant or idle, mother; and her music is something to be proud of, if she's not clever at needlework or cookery."

But what use was music to the wife of a working farmer? Mrs. Gibson looked anxiously at David.

"Your mind's made up, lad?"

He nodded.

"I should have spoken to her sooner, only I wanted to be sure you'd welcome her. She's such a tender little creature, mother; and I don't think Mrs. Elsinore's too kind to her."

"Well," and the self-denial Mrs. Gibson put into this speech was worth something, "well, David, you've been a good son to us, and if you've set your heart on Hildred I'll try and make her welcome. The sooner you settle things the better. You might be married next month, when once the hay-making's over."

David shook his head.

"She mustn't be hurried," he said, gravely, "she's over young yet to take the care of a house upon her. I only want to know she's mine, and that I've the right to care for her and shield her."

Mrs. Gibson, who hated mysteries, went down to the Rectory the very next day, and opened her heart to Mrs. Elsinore.

"She's a pretty creature," admitted the wealthy matron, frankly; "and you may have looked higher for her, but David's a good steady lad. The farm pays well, and, of course, when we're taken he'll have the biggest share of all we have to leave. My son can afford to keep a wife who doesn't know how to soil her fingers. I won't say but that I'd rather he'd fancied some one more like his mother; but Hildred has a sweet temper, and, as I said before, the master and I won't stand in the way."

Mrs. Elsinore's feelings were mixed. She had regarded David Gibson as the future partner of her own daughter Martha; but, on the other hand, she would be glad to see Hildred married. She was jealous of her husband's love for his first-born. She would like to have him and the home entirely for her own brood.

"You are very generous," she said, at last, "it's not many people would welcome a feckless girl like Hildred."

"I always liked her," confessed Mrs. Gibson. "We haven't much to say to each other; but Hildred and I have always been good friends. David 'll take good care of her, and it'll be nice for you to have a daughter settled so near."

Strange to say, neither of the matrons questioned Hildred's acceptance of her first offer. Mrs. Gibson wouldn't dream a girl could refuse her son, and Mrs. Elsinore had promptly decided in her own mind that it was too good a chance to be lost, and, willing or not, Hildred must marry David.

The Rector was away. Business had taken him to London, and he would sleep at his sister's, only returning the following morning.

His managing wife rejoiced over his absence. Full well she knew his weakness where Hildred was concerned. Now she would settle the affair, and present his daughter to him as the future Mrs. David Gibson on his return.

It was June, and nearly as warm as August. Hildred was lying on the shabby sofa in her father's study. It was her favourite room, and, for once, Mrs. Elsinore had not objected to her love of solitude.

She was paler and thinner than when two months ago she had walked through the Castle grounds at Lord Netherton's side; but she was beautiful as ever—more beautiful

David thought when, in obedience to her mother's instructions, he entered unannounced, closing the door after him.

He was six years older than Hildred, and he had loved her ever since he could understand what love meant. How beautiful she looked in her soft grey dress, with her bright hair plaited in one thick coil round her head. She looked just like a little white snowdrop as she lay back on the shabby sofa.

"Are you better to-night, Hildred?" he asked, as he took her hand. He had always called her by her Christian name till the last year, and he slipped back into the old habit to-night.

"Much better, thank you, Mr. Gibson." She had risen now and settled herself in a sitting posture. She was a little surprised to see him, but had not the least suspicion of his errand. "I am glad, for I have been ill such a long time."

"You look like a little white ghost," said David, gently. "I've been very anxious about you, Hildred. I missed you sorely."

She rather wondered at the repeated use of her name; but she and David were old friends, so perhaps it was natural.

"You will have to miss me altogether soon," she said, cheerfully, "for as soon as I am strong enough I want father to let me go away!"

"For change of air?"

"For change of occupation," she said, brightly. "Mother would tell you I am a dead failure here. Father has almost promised to send me to some school where they will give me good lessons in music and singing if I teach the little ones."

"You mustn't do it, Hildred!" said David, passionately. "You must give up all idea of it. We couldn't spare you."

"I don't think anyone will miss me much," she answered, a little sadly, "unless it's dad."

"I should miss you terribly. That's what I came to say to-night."

"But you didn't know I was going."

"No," and he nearly crushed the soft fingers in his strong clasp, "I didn't know that; but it's true, Hildred. I can't do without you. I want you for my wife, my darling, to be with me for always!"

His wife!

There was a great stillness. The study was quite shut off from the rest of the house. No sound broke the silence, and the flower-scented air seemed to Hildred to echo over and over again those two words—his wife.

She knew what marriage was, this beautiful lonely child, and, looking round about her at the husbands and wives she knew, Hildred had fancied it brought more pain than joy. She had a high ideal of love. Love was something which beautified life, and left it desolate when love's object was removed. Sometimes, in a dreamy, speculative sort of way, the child had even wondered whether love would ever come to her. Well, one thing she knew—she did not love David Gibson.

"Sweetheart," he went on simply, "I'm but a great rough fellow, and you are fit to be a princess; but, Hildred, if you search the world through you'll never meet with one that loves you more. It's part of myself to care for you, I could not help it if I would."

And then she found her voice.

"You're just the best friend I ever had, David—but I don't love you. And there's something tells me I never shall."

"But, my darling," he persisted, falling into the blunder on which dozens of men have shipwrecked their life's happiness before, "the love will come in time."

She shook her head.

"Love comes unsought," she said, gravely, "if it's love worth having."

"Don't send me away," he pleaded, "Hildred, I can't bear the thought of losing you. I'd rather wait years for you than give you up."

A faint hope seized the girl. Mrs. Gibson had never seemed to like her; might not his mother's wishes have some weight with David?

"They would never like it," she said, simply,—"your people, I mean. Oh, David, indeed you had better give it up."

"Mother says you have the sweetest temper she ever saw, and my father told me to give you his blessing and say he'd like to think your face was to be the sunshine of my home. Oh, Dreda, my darling, won't you consent? My whole life will be a blank if you send me away."

The girl looked away from him, out into the old garden where the last rays of the sun were sinking to a golden glory in the west. Must she consent? She who had dreamed of ambition, of a new world to be opened to her by her talents! She who loved music and poetry, and all things bright and beautiful! Must she put all her fair dreams aside, and go through life with no thought beyond the little world of Netherton, her hopes and ambitions bounded by the Highlands farm?

(To be continued.)

A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

The December breakers rose with a mad roar and broke with peculiar fury upon the huge rocks that skirted the coast. A fierce gale was blowing below the threatening sky, a few flakes of snow forming a weird contrast to the dark-gray clouds that were hovering over the earth. Nature seemed in arms against herself, and was struggling with frightful insistence.

Upon the cliffs overlooking the wild rush of angry waters rose a building of castellated architecture, turreted after the fashion of those old edifices that marked the last decade. It was not an old building, yet there was that about it which stamped it with the appearance of age, as a relic of the dead days that haunt romantic memories. Perhaps it was as much its dreary, almost hideous loneliness, its utter isolation, as its ancient architectural design, that gave it its look of antiquity; for, even from the highest point in the edifice, there was not another habitation in sight.

One or two sloops and a few brigs had gone to pieces on the rocks below the castle, with all on board lost; and the people of the little village, ten miles away, even avoided the highway, half a mile from the house, after dark, as the place had the reputation of being haunted. No one ever ventured nearer to it than the highway, even at noontide, and that commanded but scant view of the castle.

It was known to be occupied by old Felix Blunt and his daughter Agnes; but there was more than one person in the dingy village who considered Felix Blunt queer, if not exactly crazy. He drove into the village in a ramshackle old cart about twice a week, bought provisions and whatever might be required for the consumption of the family, then out again, and no one ever dared ask the grim-visaged, taciturn man a question.

There were those who insisted that he had gone there to seclude Agnes from the world, for some cause that could not be fathomed; but there the similarity of opinion ceased; for some insisted that she was strangely beautiful, with dark, somewhat Semitic features, while others were equally certain that her hair was yellow, her features irregular and not classic, and no one was ever willing to admit that he might be mistaken, and that it was another than Agnes Blunt that he had seen.

The mystery interested them for a time, and then they rather forgot it and dropped the theme, save now and then when some one had something new to relate.

But the dismal, isolated life at the Castle was continuing.

As the waves beat upon the rocks and the wind howled fiercely about the elevated turrets, a young girl appeared at one of the upper windows, drawing the heavy *portière* aside with a beautiful hand that was heavily jewelled. She gazed down into the plunging, seething waters and shivered, half-drawing the *portière* about her bare shoulders, as if for warmth.

She was singularly beautiful, her great, soft dark eyes lighted half with fear, half with wistfulness. Her complexion was a clear olive without colour, her mouth and teeth as perfect as Psyche's own. She was tall, lithe, and perfectly graceful, a fact strongly emphasized by the Greek folds of her handsome gown. Her curly dark hair was piled high upon her head and fastened with diamonds that an empress might have envied. Her bare arms, round and firm as those of a child, were encircled with diamonds, while the same jewels blazed upon her bosom.

There was some suggestion of the Semite in her contour, but it only added to the unusual type of beauty that was almost weird in its startling effect.

She did not speak for some time, but stood watching the lashing of the waves in silent fear; then, with a strangled shiver, she turned.

"Light the lamps, Agnes," she cried, in a curious tone. "Is it late, or is it only the darkness of the storm that makes it seem so?"

A girl came out of the heavier shadows, dimly outlined in the gray light. It would have been a pretty face in another setting, but the pale-yellow hair about the brow, the shifting eyes of lightish blue, and the white, compressed lips gave it a sinister expression that was not agreeable.

She smiled as Brenda spoke, but it did not cover the gleam of hatred in the pale eyes at the sound of the soft, musical voice.

"It grows dark so early at this season," she answered, as she struck a match and lighted one of the tall lamps. "It is not later than four, I think, and the storm is strengthening."

Brenda shuddered.

"And Lionel is not due until five," she said, drearily. "I am bitterly afraid, Agnes. It is foolish, I know. I ought to be so happy that he will be here in one little hour; but it's such a lonely, desolate road on a night like this."

"Nonsense! Mr. Warrender has come in worse storms than this."

"Perhaps. I told you it was foolish. Draw the curtains and light another lamp. I shan't feel the storm so much then."

The girl did as she had been bidden.

"Come here and sit down, Agnes," her mistress exclaimed, uneasily. "Not over there, but here upon this stool at my feet, where the firelight can fall upon you. How pretty you look with that lace square upon your yellow hair! If you would not dress so like a Quakeress, you might be really a very pretty girl."

Another gleam of hatred shot through the girl's eyes, but it was quickly extinguished.

"It does not befit a lady's-maid to dress otherwise," she answered, slowly.

"Why, pshaw!" exclaimed Brenda, laughing. "You are more my friend than my maid. I have no friend but you, Agnes. Some day you will marry a rich man, and then you will get over your Puritanical ideas of dress."

"I marry, madame? You know that I never shall. Whom do I see here that——"

"Ah, but we shall be here only such a little while now—such a very little while, you know. Lionel has promised me that he will acknowledge our marriage to his father, and then, you know, I shall take my rightful place in the world. You shall still be my friend."

A cruel sneer curled the girl's lip.

"Do you think that Mr. Warrender intends to do that, madame?" she asked.

"Do what?"

"Acknowledge your marriage."

"Why, to be sure!"

The girl made no reply, and, leaning forward, Brenda caught her by the shoulder.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, hoarsely.

Agnes turned and passionately caught the two small hands in her own. The fire-glow shone upon her pale, set face, giving it a curious expression.

"You will be angry if I tell you!" she cried, in a thick, heavy voice. "You would tell him."

"No, I will not."

"You swear that you will never tell him, that you will never betray me? My father would kill me if he knew."

"I swear I will not."

"Then listen while I tell you that Lionel Warrender never means to acknowledge his marriage to you. Haven't you seen it yourself? Have you not noticed that every time he comes he remains a shorter time? That he comes less frequently than he did even a month ago, and less frequently last month than the month before? Have you observed no change in his countenance? Can't you see how nervous he has grown, how he starts at the sudden opening of a door? He used to be jealous if one of us entered the room when he was here, grudging every moment that belonged to him, yet now he never comes without Darcy Brooke is with him; and, pardon me, madame, he knows Brooke loves you—you, Lionel Warrender's wife!"

The voice ceased; there was dead silence for a moment, then Brenda snatched her hands away and sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing with wrath.

"How dare you say that!" she cried, with quivering indignation. "How dare you! It is false—utterly, cruelly false! My husband loves me, and he is a gentleman! The greatest scoundrel under Heaven could not contemplate the fiendish act of which you speak!"

She paused from inability to proceed. Agnes commanded her countenance with wonderful dexterity, and replied with well-simulated sadness,—

"I said I should only make you angry. I did it only for your good. I thought only of your welfare."

An expression of contrition crossed the lovely face. She sat down immediately and placed her hand upon the maid's bowed head.

"Forgive me," she said, gently. "Of course I know you spoke only through your love and fear for me; but you must not say it again. Why, don't you know, even if Lionel had done that impossible thing you suggest—ceased to love me—there is a tie as sacred as Heaven itself that would hold his honour to me? Have you forgotten our baby, Agnes?"

"No, I have not forgotten, and it is that which makes me doubt more than ever. How has he acted toward the child for the last few times that he has been here? Mr. Brooke has carried the little fellow about in his arms and kissed him; but has the boy's father done it? The baby has not been in Mr. Warrender's arms for over a month."

The young mother drew back, pale and trembling.

"Is that true, Agnes?" she whispered.

"As true as Heaven!"

Brenda was silent, transfixed with horror. The maid watched her for awhile, reveling in the white anguish of the set face; then she lifted herself closer, and said in a strange under tone,—

"What proof have you of your marriage, Mrs. Warrender?"

"None!" she answered, stoutly. "None, but—my child!"

"And that is worse than none!"

"Good Heavens! You would not have me believe——"

"Hush! For the love of Heaven, not a word! It is Mr. Warrender. If he knows that you suspect him, there will be absolutely no hope for you. If you would save your child from shame you must have a care. Remember your oath."

The two women faced each other for a moment, the expressions of their faces indescribable, then the door was thrown violently open, and a fair, handsome, boyish fellow sprung into the room.

"What, my darling!" he exclaimed, eagerly pressing his lips to his wife's, "not down to meet me? For shame! It is the first time in all our happy married life."

CHAPTER II.

Brenda summoned a smile to her lips, but it was a ghastly effort, a faint imitation of the radiant happiness with which her husband had been heretofore welcomed.

"I didn't hear you," she answered, with a piteous attempt at gaiety. "Agnes and I were weaving fancies here before the fire as we listened to the storm. And you are early, aren't you?"

"Not much. The storm was breaking, and we rode a trifle harder than usual."

"We? Why, then you are not alone?"

"Why, no! Brooke is with me."

Brenda laughed, but it was not the musical laugh peculiar to her. It contained a dry, metallic note that was not altogether pleasant.

"I shall begin to wonder which of you is really my true knight, by and by," she said, lightly, but with a slight bitterness of accent. "Never one without the other."

"But I thought you liked Brooke?"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"And so I do. But is that a reason why he should always share with me the brief hour that is granted me of my husband's society?"

"Why, you inhospitable little wretch!" laughed her husband, carelessly. "If you were not the most beautiful woman in existence, and I did not love you with all my heart, I believe I should actually scold you."

"And you do love me, Lionel?"

"Love you? It is a poor word, Brenda. I have often tried to find some expression that fitted my adoration, but they all sink into insignificance."

There was a look of triumph in the beautiful eyes as they were turned for a moment upon Agnes, and the old, radiant smile of welcome was upon her lips as she put out her hand to Brooke.

"It is so good of you to bring him to me!" she said, sweetly. "I think these little hours of stolen happiness almost make up to me for the days of misery that a secret marriage entails."

Brooke pressed her hand, holding it just a moment longer than etiquette demanded.

He was tall and straight of limb, with an athletic figure that men envied. He was dark and unusually handsome, with the poetic, passionate beauty of men born in the tropics, and characterised by the languid grace that marks them.

"You are too young to know the meaning of misery, Mrs. Warrender," he said, gently, flushing slightly. "You are scarcely more than a child now. How is baby?"

A spasm of pain contracted the mother's face. The question had brought back to her Agnes's words, and she remembered, with a little shiver of horror, that her husband had not even referred to the child.

"He is well, thank you," she answered, in a choked sort of way.

"Are we not to see him? May I not ask Agnes to bring him?"

Still Lionel Warrender said nothing. On the contrary, he had taken a cigarette from a silver case and was lighting it indifferently. An iron hand seemed to clasp the mother's heart, but she put a tremendous restraint upon herself and turned to Agnes.

"Bring him," she said, briefly; then to her husband, "See where you have thrown that match, Lionel! We shall have a fire here some day if you are not more careful; and I can't imagine a better place for that sort of thing, particularly on a night like this."

He walked to the window, and, drawing the curtain aside, looked out through the darkness towards the wild sea without replying. All the eagerness at meeting her again had died out of his countenance, and a harassed, haggard expression had taken its place.

She turned away with a sharply suppressed sigh that was almost a sob, as the door opened to admit Agnes with a dainty bundle of humanity and lace.

It was a lovely little face, with eyes strangely like its mother's, that looked into Brooke's own as he took the child from the girl's arms.

"How he is growing!" the man exclaimed, brushing the peach-blow cheek with his moustached lips. "And I never saw such a beautiful child. He combines all his father's best points with some of yours. See him make that wild grab for my scarf-pin! Oh! no, my little man! That is a long, sharp dagger, dangerous for such dainty fingers as yours."

He was holding the baby up, and the child was crowing with delight as he made frantic efforts to grasp anything that came within reach of his tiny hands. It was a pretty picture, but Brenda was blind to it.

Her husband stood still with his back to them, staring out silently upon the storm. She bore it as long as she could endure the torture, then she cried out almost fiercely,—

"Lionel, have you forgotten that you are a father?"

He turned with a violent start, like one who has been suddenly aroused from a deep sleep.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, a wan smile forced over his features. "I beg your pardon! What is it? Oh, the baby! Halloo! little man!"

He put out his finger, which the baby clasped in his little pink fist, but he neither offered to kiss it nor to take it from Brooke. There was a horror almost too deep for expression in Brenda's eyes. She glanced again at Agnes, but the triumph was now upon the maid's part. Brenda laughed harshly.

"Upon my word," she exclaimed, with an effort at lightness, "one would think, to see you, that the positions were reversed, and that Mr. Brooke was baby's father, proudly exhibiting him to a not over-admiring guest."

Both men flushed hotly. Neither spoke, but after another hasty kiss, Brooke restored the child to Agnes, who took it from the room.

"I think I shall go to change my dress now, if you will allow me, Mrs. Warrender," Brooke said, quietly.

"By all means," answered Brenda. "You are at home now, you know."

He bowed himself out, and when the door had closed she stood for a moment gazing irresolutely at her husband's back. He was leaning his elbow upon the mantel-shelf, his head supported by his hand, looking into the fire. She went up and stood beside him.

"What is the matter, Lionel?" she asked, quietly.

He lifted his head, smiled at her in a vague sort of way, then sat in a huge Turkish chair and drew her down upon his knee.

"Nothing," he answered, with but too-evidently assumed lightness. "Tell me what you have done during my absence, pretty one?"

"What do I always do?" she asked, with a deprecatory shrug of her shoulders. "I look out of the window and listen to the roar of the sea breaking upon the rocks."

He shivered slightly.

"It is not an exciting life, is it?" he asked, drawing her head down upon his breast and looking over it into the glowing coals.

"I should not mind it if——"

"If what?"

She pushed his hand aside and sat up, forcing him to look at her.

"If only I were an acknowledged wife, and

my baby bore the name to all the world that belongs to him before Heaven and man."

"But, my dear Brenda——"

"I know what you would say. It has been the same thing through the whole long two years of our married life. Your father! Always your father! But, Lionel, you never think of mine! You need not look like that. I know my father is old and poor and ignorant; but he is my father, just the same, and as dear to me as yours can be to you. I listened to his curse falling upon me for your sake, not daring to tell him that I was an honoured wife, because I had sworn to be silent. I loved you so madly that I almost forgot his wild words, his violent grief; but now, since I am a parent myself, it has all come back to me, and I hear nothing from morning until night and from night until morning, in the roar of those awful breakers, but the words of my father's awful curse, the sound of his bitter weeping. There he is to-day, bent, old, broken with sorrow and shame, striving with the little strength that is left him to continue his wrecked life; standing behind that dingy counter of his miserable little pawn-shop from early morning until late at night, listening to the woes of others, himself the most miserable of all. Oh, it is horrible! Let me tell him—let me tell him."

He put her from his knee very gently and arose, resuming his old stand by the mantel.

"I can't!" he exclaimed, harshly. "You must not ask it—at least, not yet."

"But why? Why?"

"I have told you already. It would mean disinheritance."

"But is not that better than allowing your child to remain unacknowledged?"

"No!" he cried, almost roughly. "You do not understand. I could not bear it. I have lived all my life in luxury; I know nothing of work."

"But I would work for you. I have not been brought up in idleness. I can——"

"Hush! I am not such a scoundrel as that. At most I am only a coward; but Heaven knows that is bad enough. Don't ask it, Brenda, I can't do it. I can't! Not yet—not yet!"

She walked up to him with slow, firm step. She placed her hand upon his arm; their eyes met. Her voice was very low, almost uncanny, as she said:

"Will it always be 'not yet,' Lionel? Will there ever come a time when you will acknowledge us—your child and your wife?"

He shrank back from her, his face growing cold and gray.

Something in his expression struck terror to her very soul. She did not hear his reply, if reply was ever made, but stood staring at him dumbly, some wild determination forming in her brain.

If he had had but the courage to tell her then of the horrible oath that bound him, the terrible life-secret that sealed his lips, how many hours of wretched misery he might have spared them both!

But he dared say nothing.

CHAPTER III.

"Agnes."

"Yes, madame."

"Come quick and help me dress."

"But, madame—"

"There is not a minute to lose. Hurry, Agnes! The plainest simplest dress I have."

"You are not going—"

"To follow my husband to his home? Yes, I am. There! don't try to dissuade me, for I tell you it will do no good. There are not people enough in the world to stop me! I have my child to consider, and I tell you that I will go!"

The sweet face had never been so filled with determination. About the great, beautiful eyes there was grown shadows, as if of age, in that one brief night, but in their velvety depths there lurked a resolution that Agnes Blunt had never believed the beautiful Juwess could summon. She rather shrunk from the set countenance of the determined woman.

"But think of my father, madame!" exclaimed the girl, really alarmed. "Heaven knows what he would do to me if he knew that I had allowed you to go, or that I had told you anything to arouse your suspicions."

"But he must not know. You must deceive him. I shall be gone only such a very little while tell him that I am ill; that you are to serve my meals in my own room. Surely, Agnes, you love me well enough to help me in this the greatest emergency of my life."

"But you swear to return, madame?"

"I need not swear. My baby will be here. I leave him to you, during my absence. Remember that he is all I have now that makes life worth the living. If you would befriend a helpless and friendless woman, be good to him, dear girl, and Heaven will surely bless you."

"You discovered, then, that what I told you was the truth?"

A spasm of pain shot across the pale, lovely face. For a moment Bunda closed her eyes and leaned heavily against an inlaid table.

"I don't know what I have discovered," she answered, in a low monotone. "It may be much, it may be nothing but insane fancies that insult my husband more than they do even myself; but the horrible fear is in my heart now, and I must know! I could not live in his presence another hour with that frightful suspicion lying at my heart. For the first time in all my life the hours dragged like centuries while he remained. I thought he would never go. His kiss blistered my lips, and the touch of his arm about my waist was like a coil of serpent. Oh, it was hideous!"

The unhappy woman shivered at the recollection. The maid's back was to her as she took a plain, dark gown from her closet, therefore she could not see the expression of almost fiendish triumph that crossed the colourless face.

"If I had but kept this awful thing to myself you might have been spared all this, madame," she said, with hypocritical regret. "It was my love for you that made it so hard for me to see you deceived."

"I know that, and I thank you from the very bottom of my heart!" cried Brenda, rousing herself. "Do you suppose that I would have a shadow cast upon my boy's birth to save myself from suffering? I tell you, child, that if the whole world must be turned to prove our marriage, I will prove it!"

"But you must take care—you must take great care. The slightest false move upon your part might cost you the boy's whole future. You must forget yourself in your efforts for him. And, alas! madame, you are so young and so innocent. It pleases you to call me a child, but you have seen but little of this world in comparison with my experience. I wish you would do nothing without consulting me, madame. I have been surrounded with villainy more or less all my life, and I know so well how to meet it. I wish, for the baby's sake, that you would promise to do nothing without first telling me."

"And I do promise, Agnes. You are the only friend I have. Heaven bless you, dear! Keep your father from knowing of my absence, if you can. I shall be back within three days. Take care of my darling. Let nothing happen to him, whatever may befall his wretched mother."

The snow was still falling beneath a lowering sky; the wind howled more fiercely than ever. Brenda shivered as she glanced from the window.

For a moment Agnes left the room to get her cloak, then returned swiftly.

"Madame," she exclaimed, "my father is going to the village this morning. He will be gone, as you know, half the day, as his cart makes but little progress, and it will be slower than ever in the storm. If you wish, I will drive you to the station where Mr. Warrender and his friend take the train."

"It will save me a walk of many miles. Don't let us be five minutes behind him in starting; there is no time to lose."

She closely wrapped her heavy, handsome coat about her, pinned a thick veil across her face, and swathing her throat in heavy furs, faced the biting wind.

Agnes held the reins and drove rapidly, her white face rigid and colourless even under the freezing wind. They talked but little, and then in monosyllables—Brenda too miserable for conversation, and Agnes too busy with her own plans.

She hated her mistress with as violent a hatred as women are ever regarded in this world, and she loved her mistress's husband with the same degree of violence. It was the wild mania of her life—the uncontrollable impetus that was ruling her entire existence.

She watched Brenda as she took her place in the train, saw her as she shrank back into her corner to escape observation, then she turned her horses' heads towards home.

"I think I have managed the first stroke well," she said aloud, with compressed lips and firmly drawn brows. "If I can only succeed as well with the second. Ah, well! the devil takes care of his own, and I will trust to him to help me. The little fool fell into everything with a readiness that almost took me off my feet. I must have father discover her absence, without suspecting me of having planned it. He is not so great a fool as she, but I fancy I shall be equal to that. And then there is that old letter from that crazy cousin of hers that she treasures so sacredly; that will help me. My dear Mrs. Warrender, if you had played your cards right into my hands by intention, you could not have done it more skilfully."

Meantime the miserable little wife was being borne rapidly onward, to what fate she scarcely dared think.

For the first time in two years she was out again into the world. It seemed strange and altogether wretched. The bustle around confused her, and her head ached terribly; she held her fingers to her throbbing temples, but she did not seem to be able to collect her scattered thoughts.

After all, where was she going, and what for? What right had she to doubt her husband on the simple word of suspicion expressed by a girl that knew nothing of what she was saying? He had only been preoccupied and harassed. Had she any right to accuse him upon such grounds as these? From the bottom of her heart she wished one moment that she had not come, and then the next she remembered that awful look that had almost paralyzed her heart and brain when she had asked him if he ever intended to acknowledge his wife and his child.

She tormented herself as only a woman can do during all the long hours of that horrible ride, and had convinced herself by the time of her arrival at the station that she had done wrong—terribly wrong—and that she would either take the next train for home, or that she would send for her husband, and tell him how terribly she had sinned against him, begging his pardon upon bended knee, if needs were, for the injustice and cruelty of her suspicion.

She rose and staggered from the train as it rolled into the station. The snow had ceased to fall, but great drifts stood in places feet deep, while over the streets of the great city it lay in a white mantle, cut in places from wheels and runners, but strangely beautiful for all that.

She went immediately to the ticket-office, and inquired when the next train returned to B——, groaning slightly as she received the information that there was not another before the following morning.

It was already late in the day, and she decided that there was but one thing for her to do, and that was to go to a hotel, send for her husband, and tell him everything.

She felt relieved as she saw that that was the only course left open to her, and there

was an expression almost of hope and happiness upon her face as she called a cab.

"To the Grand Hotel!" she said, after a momentary hesitation.

How strangely the city looked to her after her long residence in the country! She had lived all her life right here in the midst of it all; and yet there seemed to be nothing familiar in the handsome streets lined with the magnificent houses.

Brenda almost forgot her fears in her child-like delight in the streets. She unfastened her veil and removed it, that she might drink in the beauties of the scene as she used to do at Christmas time when she had emerged from the dingy rooms back of that little shop in the city, with the sign of the three balls in front.

She opened the window of the cab and leaned her face out.

There was a smile of delight upon her lips, the pretty dimple in either cheek showing deliciously. Cabs were passing her swift as the wind.

Then suddenly there came another, and she had recognized one of the men in it. She leaned forward breathlessly, the smile fading from lips and eyes, and a rigid, drawn expression taking its place.

The gentleman was bending toward his companion, a graceful, beautiful girl who was laughing into his face. There was an expression of tenderness upon his countenance as he arranged the wraps more closely about her to protect her from the cold.

It did not require a second look to tell Brenda who he was.

There was no mistake—could be none. It was Lionel Warrender, her husband.

CHAPTER IV.

How Brenda got to the hotel, who assigned her a room, or how she got to it, was ever afterward a mystery to her. Her head was in a whirl, her eyes burned as if there were living fires within them, and in her ears was the mighty rush of waters.

She never paused to characterize her feelings by any such common name as jealousy. She was not dominated by any such impulse as that. Her suspicions had been aroused by her husband's singular manner, and now here was an evidence that she had not misunderstood him at all. His manner toward that girl in the cab had not been one of a stranger, nor even of a friend. It was that of a lover.

How well she remembered the old expression in his eyes when they had been turned in that very way upon herself. She groaned audibly as she recalled it.

But what was she to do?

There was no time to sit and grieve. She had her boy to think of. What was there that she could do? And what was there that she dared do?

With her head buried in her hands, she sat down in her room in the hotel and tried to think. It was about the most miserable effort that she ever remembered to have encountered. She tried to think only of her son and not for him; but she could not quite forget the soreness of her own heart, the bruise that had been put upon her tender, loving spirit.

She knew now that there was no use to send for her husband. She told herself again and again that he was tired of her, that he had ceased to love her, that he was infatuated with another, and that he was the very last one of all the world from whom she could expect justice. And then the thought of Darcy Brooke came to her; but she remembered Agnes's words, that Brooke loved her, Lionel Warrender's wife; and while her heart softened toward him, she put him out of the calculation.

Then suddenly she leaped to her feet with something like a forlorn hope blazing in her eyes.

Lionel had often spoken to her of his fear of his father, but never of his mother. Might not his mother befriend her? She was a mother too, and surely that would be a sweet bond of sympathy between them that would move any heart.

She wrapped her heavy coat about her quickly, pinned on her hat, and summoned a cab.

It was certainly a very elegant figure that she presented as she took her place inside. Her dress was of broadcloth, plain black, and tailor-made, her coat one of the long ones that covered her graceful figure from head to foot, the heavy fur trimmings giving her the appearance of a Russian princess, an effect that her raven hair and eyes intensified. She was rather quiet as she took her seat in the cab. Her eyes contained a set stare, and her face was even a trifle paler than usual, but she gave the address to the coachman in a subdued but quiet tone that told nothing to the curious.

She was not surprised at the elegance of the residence before which the cab drew up, for she knew that the Warrenders were reputed to be of fabulous wealth, therefore she was prepared and not overawed. Her own simple bringing up had been different enough from this, Heaven knows, but Brenda was adaptable to almost any surroundings, and it was in a smooth, even tone that she inquired of the man who answered her ring,—

"Is Mrs. Warrender at home?"

"Yes, madame," he answered, "but this is not her reception day, and I am afraid she is engaged."

"Will you ask her? I am very particular about seeing her to-day."

"If you will not mind being delayed for half-an-hour, she will be at liberty, but I have been forbidden to disturb her until then."

"I will wait."

The servant bowed and showed her to a handsome room, leaving her alone.

It was the first time that she had ever been in Lionel's home, though he had been her husband for two long years. She gazed about her with a close, tight feeling at her heart. She seemed incapable of fixing in her mind anything that she saw. There were pictures upon the walls, but she knew not of what; there were draperies of fabulous value, but she knew neither the shade nor the quality.

She tried to sit down, but somehow she did not seem able to remain upon the chair.

Suppose Lionel should enter and find her there, what should she say to him? and what should she say to his mother when she came? Ah! she told herself, with a shiver, she should know what to say to a mother when the time came.

She was counting so much upon her maternity, poor mistaken child!

And then, as she wandered from one end of the room to the other, she stopped suddenly, with an awful start. It was Lionel's voice that she heard in the next room, and heard so distinctly that she knew it was only a piece of tapestry instead of a door that separated them. She paused rooted to the spot.

"You wished to see me, father?" she heard her husband say. "Is it anything special? If it is not, won't you excuse me until to-morrow? I have a dinner engagement, and I am afraid I'm already late."

"It is something very special," another voice replied—a stern voice, with anger trembling in it—a harsh, cold voice without sympathy or love. "Sit down there!"

Evidently Lionel obeyed the command, for after a moment the stern voice continued, while Brenda, leaning breathlessly and tremblingly against the wall, listened.

"When are you going to obey my command and ask Violet Clifton to be your wife?"

There was a short pause, during which Lionel Warrender moved uneasily.

"I have already told you——" he began; but the elder man interrupted him.

"I don't care what you have told me!" he cried, hoarsely, leaning forward and holding his son's eye firmly. "You have told me a batch of lies from beginning to end. You are a scoundrel, and not fit to be any woman's husband!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Don't presume to speak to me in a tone like that! I know all about your disgraceful conduct, and either it ceases from this night or you cease to be son of mine!"

"But, sir——"

"There are no buts, and I will hear nothing upon the subject! You have deceived me for months that I know of, perhaps longer; but I have suspected you, and my suspicions have been verified. I had a detective follow you on your recent trip out of the city, I know where you went."

"And if you do, what then?"

The question was asked bravely enough—so bravely that Brenda's heart was lifted with hope for one little moment.

"What then?" cried the elder man, his voice rising as his rage increased, "what then? Listen to me. It was two years ago, I think, that I discovered your disgraceful *liaison* with that Jew pawnbroker's daughter. I forbade you then ever to speak to her again, and you promised me obedience. How have you kept your word?"

Brenda was panting almost to suffocation. Would Lionel Warrender, the father of her child—her husband before Heaven—allow her to rest under so foul an imputation as that? It seemed to her that she would die before his answer came, and then she was forced to listen closely to catch the words, so low were they spoken.

"I am afraid I have not kept it well."

"How, sir? You dare acknowledge——"

"Father, there is no use in our indulging in the usual scene. Perhaps I have not done right; but, after all, am I worse than many others?"

"You young scamp! how dare you sit there and calmly make so vile a remark to your own father!" cried the old man, his voice hoarse with anger. "How dare you, I say! Look here! You shall take your choice now, here, this night! What is it to be? You are either to give that creature up, never to see her again, or leave this house this night never to enter it again as long as you live—never to be my son. I shall disinherit you, and every farthing of my millions shall go to charity. Mind, I shall not accept your word. There must be the strongest proof that you never, either by word or letter, are to hold the slightest communication with her. You know me. You know that I never break my word. You will go out of that door to-night a pauper, without so much as a shilling to keep you from the doors of the poor-house, unless you make the promise that I demand. Are you ready to do it?"

There was a long and painful hesitation. Lionel had evidently arisen. Brenda heard his quick, nervous step up and down the room; then he paused before his father. His voice was husky and heavy.

"I am willing to abide by your terms," he said, slowly.

"But you have not heard them all. I add to what I have already said the command that you ask Miss Clifton before this night is over to be your wife."

There was another hesitation longer than the first, then Lionel's voice reached his listening wife again. His words were:

"I consent to that also!"

Brenda could hear no more. What was this? Was she to see another woman deceived even as she had been? Her brain was on fire. There was no mistake now. Agnes was not wrong. He had never meant to acknowledge her—her, the mother of his child.

Then she forgot everything in the memory of that other hideous speech that he had made, and her outraged honour could bear no more. She flung back her coat, and seizing the tapestry in both her hands, she tore it aside and stood there before them.

At the same moment a door on the other

side opened and a woman entered the room. Brenda saw her. She rushed forward, and would have flung herself at the woman's feet in her prayer for aid, but overwrought nature had stood too much. She fell in the middle of the floor, not unconscious, but unable to move or speak under the awful horror.

Lionel and his mother started towards her with one impulse, but before either could reach her his father had stepped between them.

"I forbid either of you to touch her!" he cried, harshly. "I know this woman by sight, and she is not a fit thing for either of you to lay hands upon!"

He rang the bell loudly for a servant, and Lionel Warrender stood there, with his wretched face covered with his hands, feeling with a shiver like death the touch of his mother's fingers upon his arm, that seemed to him to contain something both of appeal and warning!

CHAPTER V.

A PROLONGED silence prevailed in the room.

Brenda had heard every word with cruel distinctness, but if her very life had depended upon it her stiff lips could have formed no reply. She had lifted herself upon her elbow, still unable to rise, and was looking with wildest pleading at her husband.

It was a strange feeling that had come over her. It was not so much herself or her child that she wanted him to save then as his own manhood. She wanted him to speak, in order that he might not establish himself as a coward that was at the same time a scoundrel. Strangely enough, it was only of him she thought then. Her high sense of honour was outraged—not so much for the child whose honesty of birth was questioned as for the father who would silently submit to it under any circumstances whatever.

She waited for him to speak, and she waited in vain.

Neither mother nor son offered to touch her after that one indication of pity, and at last some courage was renewed in her. She dragged herself to the feet of her husband's mother, and caught the woman's garment in her trembling hands. The sad eyes were unfastened from her son's face and lowered to the piteous one that was lifted to her from the floor.

"Madame, tell him—that it is—unworthy of him!" whispered the unhappy girl. "Tell him—that he is—disgracing himself—before Heaven and man—to allow us—to rest under an—implication so foul—as the one to which he has listened. Tell him, madame, to speak for the sake of his own manhood, even if he has lost all pity for us. Remember, madame, that he is your own son, and don't for the love of Heaven, allow him to disgrace his own life by allowing us to rest under the vilest slander that was ever heaped upon an innocent woman!'

She paused and waited, but only silence answered her. It was growing maddening. She leaped to her feet. There was the light of a thousand lightnings playing in her eyes. Her hair had become loosened, and was falling in a veil about her shoulders. A crimson spot burned on either cheek. She stepped back from them. Her head was thrown up in the attitude of a defiant princess.

"Madame," she cried, her voice ringing clear and cold through the silent room, "if he will not speak, then you, as his mother, must make him do it. You must save him from the temptation that his unnatural father is heaping upon him. Don't let him prove false to himself and to Heaven for so unworthy an object as paltry gold! If he is afraid of poverty, let us work for him until we drop dead from exhaustion, before we allow him to wreck his life and ruin his soul in an effort to keep it. Madame, bid him acknowledge me as his—"

"Lionel!"

The interruption came as a hideous cry from Mr. Warrender's mother. She had flung her arms about the young man's neck, and had hidden her face upon his bosom as if a death-stroke had been given her. He caught her and held her closely to prevent her falling to the floor. She was trembling from head to foot, with that awful, shuddering quiver that precedes violent hysteria. He bent and kissed her swiftly upon the brow.

"Don't let her say it!" the elder woman whispered. 'For Heaven's sake, don't let her say it! Remember your oath, Lionel! It is your mother's life—your mother's reason—I am imploring of you! Oh, have pity!"

No one in that room but the man to whom they were addressed could hear those whispered words. Both Mr. Warrender and Brenda knew that she was speaking, but, believing that she was uttering different words from what she was, neither of them interrupted her.

Lionel's face was pale and set and cold as death. He dared not do that which his honour seemed forcing upon him. He dared not defy his father and speak the truth—that it was his wife—the mother of his child—that stood before him. His whole soul was crying out for her, but he knew that his lips must remain dumb—that however foul an implication he might rest under, he could not save himself.

He pressed his mother closely to his heart for one moment, then he placed her upon a couch and turned to his father.

The elder man was rigid as iron. There was not an atom of pity in his stern old heart, either for the unhappy girl that stood before him, or for the son whom he had loved in his own wretched way.

"What have you to say in reply to what this young woman has said?" he asked, coldly.

Lionel Warrender knew that voice well. He knew that his father prided himself upon the fact that never in his life, under any circumstances, had he broken his word, and there was no chance of his doing so now. Poverty had not the terrors for him that he had made his young wife believe, but there was another contingency of which he dared not speak that was ten thousand times worse than that which sealed his lips as closely as death itself. And the hideous part of it was that there seemed no time, even in the far distant future, when that seal could be broken.

It was a frightful position, and one that was already wrecking his young life.

"Nothing," he answered, in a hollow tone, in which there was no resemblance to his former boyish, happy voice. "Will you permit me to take her from the room? There are reasons why I should prefer that she should not remain here. I shall return at once to speak to you."

He half expected that his father would refuse, but instead he received a formal bow of permission. He went up to Brenda and drew her hand through his arm; then he picked up her hat from the floor.

"Will you come with me?" he asked, quietly. "I must speak with you alone. Don't refuse. There is nothing to be gained by remaining. Come!"

She was too much stunned to resist, even had the desire been left her. She followed his lead. He took her to a small room, and paused.

"Pin up your hair," he said, quietly. "You cannot go into the street like that. That is right," as she obeyed him. "At what hotel are you stopping? I shall call upon you there to-night. I can't say at what hour, but expect me, and I will make it as early as possible. Don't stop to talk now, for there is not time. If you have not a sitting-room as well as bed-room, engage one at once. Under what name are you there?"

"My own," she answered, somewhat defiantly.

He winced a trifle.

"And the hotel?"

"The Grand."

"Expect me to-night."

Then he led her from the house and placed her in her cab, giving the order to the coachman himself.

Not a word of affection; not a word of tenderness or sorrow for the position in which he had placed her; not a syllable of promise for the future. Brenda was stunned—bewildered. She almost forgot her misery in the peculiar surprise she felt at his conduct. How was she to know that he felt his own shame too keenly to dare speak one word upon the subject? How was she to know that the horror of his enforced conduct was stifling him, soul and body, and that his heart was crying out words that he dared not speak in fear of her righteous indignation?

Oh, if we could only read each other's hearts aright sometimes, what wretchedness might we not be spared!

Lionel Warrender watched the cab until it had turned the corner; then, with a sigh, he re-entered the house and the library.

His mother was still there. She had arisen to a sitting posture on the couch, and was listening breathlessly. Her lips were slightly apart. Her hair was disarranged, her eyes unnaturally bright. Her husband's gaze was bent upon her, so fascinated that he failed to hear the entrance of his son, but she did not even see him. She started up as Lionel entered the room and would have gone towards him, but her weak limbs refused to support her. She put out her trembling hands to him, and he went and sat beside her, holding them both in a firm and reassuring grasp.

He glanced up at his father.

"Well," exclaimed Gordon Warrender, in a tone so different from the last that his son had heard that the young man scarcely recognised it, "what have you to say?"

"Very little, sir," answered Lionel, slowly dropping his eyes. "It is a subject upon which the least said seems to me the best. I acknowledge, sir, that I have done wrong—terribly, horribly wrong, but it is a sin of which I am repenting in sack cloth and ashes. You know nothing more now than you did before, sir, yet you are willing to overlook it. If you will excuse me, I should very much rather this matter should rest in the dead past. Heaven knows it is bitter enough for me!"

He had spoken nothing but the truth, though the idea conveyed was a cruel lie, and he loathed himself for it. To his utter surprise his father bowed an assent.

"Very well," he said, coldly. "I shall expect you to keep your promise to me and ask Miss Clifton to be your wife to-morrow. Now take your mother to her room."

Only too glad to escape, Lionel obeyed. His father watched them until the door had closed upon them, then very slowly he turned to his desk and sat down, allowing his head to fall upon his hand, while his elbow rested upon the desk.

"Now what does that mean?" he asked himself, slowly. "Is there a secret in the heart of my family? What is this secret understanding between that boy and his mother? I must and will know! Great Heaven! I have sunk low indeed when I can even suggest an unformed idea against my own wife! And yet—and yet what does it mean?"

(To be continued.)

SOME tribes in India have a marriage custom which calls for the presence of a cow and a calf at the ceremony. The bride, the bridegroom and the priest drive a cow and a calf into the water, and there the bride and the bridegroom, as well as the clergyman, clutch the cow's tail, while the officiating personage pours water upon it from a glass vessel and utters a religious formula. The couple are now united in wedlock, and the priest, for his part in the ceremony, claims the animals, and also receives any sum in money which the groom thinks necessary to propitiate the idols.

THE PIGEONS AT ST. PAUL'S.

The question is sometimes asked when did pigeons first find a home amid the architecture of St. Paul's? A more correct way of putting the question would be, when was the time when they did not find a home there? In 1385 Robert de Braybroke, bishop of London, complains that there are those "who, instigated by a malignant spirit, are busy to injure more than to profit, and throw from a distance and hurl stones, arrows, and various kinds of darts at the crows, pigeons, and other kinds of birds building their nests and sitting on the walls and openings of the church, and in doing so break the glass windows and stone images in the said church." And as further illustrative of the existence of pigeons finding their home in various parts of the outside of the fabric, we find that the boys being educated at St. Paul's School were called "Paul's Pigeons." This brings us down to a time not very remote from the Great Fire of London, when the magnificent old cathedral was destroyed. Ever since the present building of St. Paul's was completed it has furnished a home for pigeons. In the many places protected from the weather in the extensive portico at the west end of the cathedral, and in the lesser porticoes at the northern and southern entrances, they have found convenient places for their nests. Beside the external resting-places, some of the birds have found within the walls of the cathedral deserted spots where they may lay their nests. There are sundry openings in the two western towers through which the birds can fly. These lead to staircases rarely trodden by the foot of man, which must furnish much quieter resting-places than the cornices of the porticoes, where so many nests are found. It is strange that the birds should have grown so indifferent to the many things which it might have been expected would arouse their fears.

The question of keeping their numbers within reasonable limits is a difficult one. At one time the vergers were allowed to shoot them, and so lately as thirty years since they have been shot from the steps at the western front of the cathedral, when the area before these steps was inclosed. Complaints were made of this at the time by the people living in the churchyard, and since then no gun has been fired at them. The eggs are now sometimes destroyed, as it is felt that if the dirt the birds make is allowed to increase indefinitely, the existence of the birds themselves will be imperilled; besides this, wire netting has been placed over some of the more prominent places where they used to build their nests. Their present estimated number is about three hundred.

There are some curious peculiarities noticed about them. The birds that live in the various parts of the western front and those that have their dwelling in the north and south porches never seem to mix, but to keep themselves quite distinct from one another. The gardens at the east end of the cathedral would seem to be a place in which all the birds would naturally be found; but those who watch them most closely say that the pigeons finding their home at the western front are never seen there. Dr. Liddon took great interest in them, and frequently filled his pockets with seed wherewith to feed them. They learnt to know him, and it was no uncommon thing to see pigeons on his shoulder or pecking out of his hand.

The pigeons are of the common breed, and there has never been any attempt to introduce any of the fancy kinds amongst them. All that are there have come of their own free will or have been hatched on the premises. The dirt of which they are the cause makes them far from popular with many of the servants of the cathedral, who are responsible for the cleanliness and good order of the exterior of the fabric; but notwithstanding this, they seem to have exercised much patience and shown great kindness to these self-installed occupants of various parts of the building.

There is a spider in New Zealand that usually throws coils of his web about the head of his prey until the wretched victim is first blinded and then choked. In many unfrequented dark nooks of the jungle you come across most perfect skeletons of small birds caught in these terrible snares.

In the course of an interesting discussion which followed the reading of a paper on colour-blindness the other day, a most curious statement was announced, to the effect that, after long research, not a single case of a woman suffering from this defect could be discovered.

Thirty, forty, fifty years ago, and longer, social letter-writing was an important part of woman's daily work. She did not read Greek then, she was not a doctor or a lecturer; she considered it *infra dig* to keep shop, bold to write books or paint pictures. Tne only book she wrote was her diary; the only pictures she painted—and watery little daubs they usually were—she hung on her own walls. So—restricted as she was—she overflowed in letter-writing.

The phrase "A hair of the dog that bit you," though now confined to a symbolic and alcoholic interpretation, has an accurately canine origin. In the Caucasus it is still common for anyone who is bitten by a dog to lay a handful of hair taken from the same animal's coat upon the wound before cauterising and bandaging it. In some mystic way the hair is supposed to prevent untoward consequences.

The sacred fires of India have not all been extinguished. The most ancient, which still exists, was consecrated twelve centuries ago in commemoration of the voyage made by the Parsees when they emigrated from Persia to India. The fire is fed five times every twenty-four hours with sandal wood and other fragrant materials, combined with very dry fuel. This fire, in the village of Oodwada, near Balsar, is visited by the Parsees in large numbers during the months allotted to the presiding genius of fire.

Travellers in Japan tell of the unconcern with which a Japanese will take a bath in full publicity, and the custom has impressed foreigners as immodest. An Englishman who has long been in the country says there is really nothing immodest in the promiscuous bathing of men, women, and children from a Japanese point of view. With them cleanliness is the object sought for, and the etiquette of the bathroom differs from the etiquette of the parlour. With Europeans, he says, the attitude of waltzers is only permitted when the music is played. It is something like this with the Japanese bathers. When the necessary operation of washing or doing other work requires it to strip becomes a duty. On the other hand, a Japanese woman would scorn to appear decollete. To her eye our ball rooms are an astonishment, and the exposure of the person for display is incomprehensible. This writer thinks that the Japanese are not excelled by their western brethren in modesty.

Perhaps the secret of the sweet expression and habitual serenity of the Japanese women can be found in their freedom from small worries. The fashion of dress never varying saves the wear of mind over that subject, and the bareness of the houses and simplicity of diet make housekeeping a mere bagatelle. Everything is exquisitely clean and easily kept so. There is no paint, no drapery, no crowd of little ornaments, no coming into the houses in the footwear worn in the dusty streets. And then the feeling of living in rooms that can be turned into balconies and verandahs at a moment's notice, of having walls that slide away as freely as do the scenes on the stage, and let in all out-of-doors, or change the suites of rooms to the shape and size that the whim of the day or the hour requires. The Japanese are learning much from us, some things not to their improvement. We might begin, with profit to ourselves, to learn of them.

The "Lawless," or "Whispering Court," is a very curious custom of unknown origin still existing at Rochford, in Essex. The Wednesday morning succeeding Michaelmas Day the steward and tenants of the manor assemble by torchlight, at cockcrow, round a post on King's Hill. The steward opens the court in a whisper, and the tenants answer to their names in the same manner. All absentees are fined for every hour's absence. The minutes of the meeting are made with a piece of coal instead of with pen and ink.

It is easy to swim if one does not become frightened. When the body is in the water and the man is breathing naturally the head will remain out and one can float almost without effort. The trouble with people is that, losing their presence of mind, they throw up their hands, when, of course, the head at once sinks beneath the surface. If a man will only remember to keep his hands down, accidental deaths from drowning would be much more infrequent, for almost anyone, whether a swimmer or not, would be able to float until relief arrived.

It is a curious fact that soldiers as a rule, look older than the same aged men in any other profession. We are not speaking of recruits, whose appearance is generally too young, but of men who have served some years in the army It is no exaggeration to state that there are thousands of soldiers, barely thirty years of age, who look at least forty. "Sentry go" is probably one of the chief causes of this premature ageing in appearance. It is one of the most wearing duties in the military life. A soldier is "on guard" for twenty-four hours at a time, during which time he must be ready to "turn out" at a moment's notice; two hours out of every six he is on his "post," no matter what the weather may be; and though a sentry-box is little better than no protection, it forms his only refuge in winter time or during a storm.

In one part of the Canton Ticino, a very quaint marriage ceremony prevails. The bridegroom dresses in his "Sunday best," and, accompanied by as many friends and relatives as he can muster for the *fête* goes to claim his bride. Finding the door locked, he demands admittance; the inmates ask him his business, and in reply he solicits the hand of his chosen maiden. If his answer be deemed satisfactory, he is successively introduced to a number of matrons and maids, some perhaps deformed, and others old and ugly. Then he is presented to some large dolls, all of which he rejects with scorn amid general merriment. The bewildered bridegroom, whose impetuosity and temper are now sorely tried, is then informed that his lady-love is absent, and invited in to see for himself. He rushes into the house, and seaaches from room to room, until he finds her in her bridal dress ready to go to church. Then are his troubles over, and his state as a Benedict assured.

It is now admitted that the inherent hue of water is blue. Even distilled water has been proved to be almost exactly of the same tint as a solution of Prussian blue This is corroborated by the fact that the purer the water is in nature the bluer is its hue. But though the selective absorption of the water determines its blueness, it is the dust particles suspended in it which determine its brilliancy. If the water of the Mediterranean be taken from different places and examined by means of a concentrated beam of light, it is seen to hold in suspension millions of dust particles of different kinds. To this fine dust it owes its beautiful, brilliant, and varied colouring. When there are few particles there is little light reflected, and the colour of the water is deep blue; but when there are many particles more light is reflected, and the colour is chalky blue-green. Along its shores the Mediterranean washes the rocks and rubs off the minute solid particles, which make the water beautifully brilliant.

FACETIÆ.

THE telephone takes everybody's word.

"A MAN'S deeds live after him." So do his mortgagees.

EVERY desire is insatiable and therefore is always in want.

WHAT is that by losing an eye has nothing left but a nose? A noise.

THE male voice a girl likes best to hear—the one with a "ring" to it.

THE destinies which shape our ends are in the hands of our barbers and our chiropodists.

"CALL that fellow a baritone," said the disgusted auditor. "He is only a bass imitation."

WOMEN jump at conclusions and generally hit. Men reason things out logically and generally miss it.

THE reason a dog can look so knowing is because he can't say anything to spoil the effect.

"TOMMY, why are you so naughty?" asked his papa. "I dess it's 'tause I'm me," said Tommy.

WHEN a boy begins to wash his neck without being told, it is a sign that he is passing into the ordeal of his first love affair.

FAIR AMATEUR: "Yes, I painted this. What school of painting would you call it?" Artist (gently): "Boarding-school."

A HUNDRED times more trouble is caused by men who can get work, than by the man who wants work but cannot get it.

"HOPE springs eternal in the human breast," but there is more spring in the legs when a fellow sits down on a tack.

"How many seconds are there in a minute?" "Do you mean a real minute, mamma, or one of your great big wait-a-minutes?"

PHYSICIAN: "I called to collect those bills which I sent you." Mr. Squills: "You are perfectly welcome to them, doctor. Here they are, all in one packet."

MRS. DE STYLE: "How do you manage to get your servants to wear caps? Mine won't." Mrs. De Fashion: "I hire a policeman to admire them."

MISTRESS: "I will not have the soup strained through my fine napkins. The idea!" Bridget: "Yer needn't moind, mum; 'tain't a clane one."

FRIBUS: "They didn't think my speech was out and dried, did they?" Secundus: "No; they wouldn't possibly think any of it had been cut."

THE only way the average man can express his disgust with lovely woman's present habit of wearing a trail is by stepping on it every chance he gets.

"WHY does Mr. Huber generally look over his glasses instead of through them?" It is because he is so stingy; he is afraid of wearing them out too soon."

DAISIE: "What surprises me about the stars is not their sizes and their distances, and all those horrid things, but how they ever found out what all their names were!"

MRS. MCSWAT: "There goes that unhappy inebriate again. Poor Chumlow! Have you any idea what drove him to drink?" Mr. McSwat: "Yes, my dear. Thirst."

"WOMEN dread firearms," she said, nervously. "How about the other kind?" he whispered, extending a couple toward her, and she never flinched.

"I SUPPOSE you haven't forgotten that it is leap year," he said, as he took a seat beside her, "and so I must be careful not to lead the conversation in a dangerous direction," and he laughed. "I had quite forgotten it," she said, with a yawn; "what's the use of remembering it when you never meet a man who is worth proposing to." This time he didn't laugh.

MANY inanimate things appear to be endowed with reason. For instance, a collar button knows when a fellow has a sore thumb, and improves the occasion to refuse to do duty.

FEATHERSTONE: "What did your sister say when you told her I was here in the drawing-room waiting for her?" Bobby: "Nothin'. But she took a ring off one finger and put it on another."

"I AM a Hill, sir—the oldest family in England." "I never heard of the Hill family being amongst those of ancient lineage." "What never heard of the proverb, 'As old as the Hills'?"

SHE (wearily): "My head aches awfully." He: "What have you been doing?" She: "I've been trying to decide whether that bargain I got to-day at a bargain counter is a bargain or not."

"WHY do we fire cannon and express our joy over Washington's birthday, and not over mine?" asked a school-teacher. "Because Washington is dead, and you ain't," was the irreverent reply.

"WHAT do these letters stand for?" asked a curious wife of her husband as she looked at his Masonic seal. "Well, really, my love," he replied, encouragingly, "I presume it is because they can't sit down."

"FOR years," observed the verbose caller to the busy editor, "I have been endeavouring to discover the lost tribes of Israel." "Has it ever occurred to you to advertise for them?" asked the editor with deep concern.

NEWWED: "How long does a man have to be married before his wife agrees with him in everything?" Oldwed (mournfully): "You'll have to ask somebody else, my boy; I've only been married forty years."

THE governess was giving little Tommy a grammar lesson the other day. "An abstract noun," she said, "is the name of something which you can think of but not touch. Can you give me an example?" "A red-hot poker."

"WE have divided up the work so that each of the directors has a fair share to do. Higginson is secretary, I am treasurer, and Proat is——" "Why, Proat is so deaf that he can't hear thunder! What does he do?" "Oh, all the complaints are referred to him."

"WHAT do you think of that artist who painted cobwebs on his ceiling so naturally that the servant-girl wore herself into an attack of nervous prostration trying to sweep them down?" "There may have been such an artist, but never such a servant-girl."

"MY dear child," said an indulgent father to his daughter, "why do you order so many new hats; it will be always the same head under each?" "Not unless I greatly overrate my powers, papa," said that *fin-de-siècle* maiden, with a sly glance at her young man.

A CANDIDATE for the Scottish rite degree. "My dear, now own up; don't you think these lodges help a fellow?" "Yes; I have noticed that a man who can't walk twice across the floor with a crying baby will march half a day with a Knight Templar's uniform on and not complain."

YOUNG REPORTER: "The storm king hurled his torn and tumbling torrents over the ruins of the broken and dismembered edifice." Old Editor: "What's that? What do you mean, young fellow?" Young Reporter: "I—er—the flood washed away Patrick M'Dougal's old cow-shed."

ONE night in the commercial room of an hotel in one of our large towns some travellers were talking over the state of trade, when one young man began to boast of the large orders he had booked. An old Scotchman interrupted him, saying, "Na, na, mon; you've din naethin of the kind." The young man very angrily retorted, "I'm a liar, then?" The old Scotchman replied, "Weel, that's nae muckle to brag aboot." The room was convulsed with laughter.

ELDER BERRY: "The members of the quartette choir have sent in their resignations, sir." Dr. Thirdly: "What's the matter?" Elder Berry: "Your announcement last Sunday: 'Providence having seen fit to afflict them with hard colds, let us join in singing Praise God from whom all blessings flow.'"

HER LAWYER—"Now, madam, don't you think that if we brought a little pressure to bear on him we could render the divorce proceedings unnecessary?" "Indade, an' we couldn't, judge. Oi had him under th' kitchen shtove wid me sittin' on top av it foor hours yisterday, an' divil th' more dacinter he bekem."

MRS. BINGO: "Are you going to the theatre in your dress suit?" Bingo: "Of course I am." Mrs. Bingo (wildly) "Then why don't you put it on? Dear, dear, I am almost ready and you haven't done a thing." Bingo: "Don't worry, dear. I have ample time to put it on while you are seeing if your hat is on straight."

ENSIGN LEHMANN, while promenading in the Berlin zoological gardens in civil attire, sees his colonel approaching in the distance, and hastily conceals himself behind a tree to escape observation. Colonel (next morning in the barracks-yard): "Ensign Lehmann, how came I to see you in plain clothes yesterday in the zoological gardens?" "Because the tree was not thick enough, colonel."

WHEN Bigley moved into an apartment house, Fogg remarked to Mrs. B., "Quite appropriate, sweet to the suites, you know." Noodle, who was present, thought it a pretty compliment; so he tried it on Bigley the next day. "I hear you have moved into a family hotel," he began; "quite appropriate; flat to the flats, you know." And Noodle wonders why Bigley should get mad over a remark that had made Mrs. B. smile so sweetly.

A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK.—A Washington man has a bright youngster who succeeded recently in getting even with his father in a very telling though unconscious manner. His father was reproving the little fellow's table manners. "Don't do that," said he "or we'll have to call you a little pig." The warning seemed to be lost, for the fault was repeated. "Do you know what a pig is?" was the inquiry, put in a solemn manner. "Yes, sir." "What is it?" "A pig is a hog's little boy." The lesson in etiquette was suspended.

"ROB," said Tom to his friend, "which is the most dangerous word in all the English language to pronounce?" "Don't know," said Rob. "Well," said Tom, "it is stumbled; because you are sure to get a tumble between the first and last letter." "Ha, ha," said Rob, "that's not bad. Now I've one for you. I saw it one day when reading the paper. Which is the longest word in all the English language?" "Valetudinarianism," said Tom, promptly. "No, sir; it's smiles, because there's a whole mile between the first and last letter." "Ho, ho!" cried Tom, "that's nothing. I know of a word that has over three miles between its beginning and ending." "Now, what's that?" asked Rob, faintly. "Beleaguered!" cried Tom, triumphantly.

A CANTANKEROUS old Presbyterian minister in Scotland once got into a debate with a boatman, while crossing a river, about faith and works, his position being that faith without works was enough. "Na, na," retorted the boatman, with much seriousness, "faith without works 'll no' do. I'll gie you an instance. We'll ca' this oar, 'faith' and this ither oar 'works.' Very well. Tak' 'faith' first," and while rowing with it the boat went round and round. "Now," said the boatman, "let's tak' 'works' next," and rowing with it alone the boat went round the other way. "We will noo," continued the boatman, "tak' 'faith' an' 'works' thegither. Noo," exclaimed he, triumphantly, as he rowed with both oars at the same time, "we can get ower the water; an' this is the only way that we can get ower the troubled ocean o' the warl' tae the peaceful shores o' immortality."

SOCIETY.

PHOTOGRAPHIC albums have gone so utterly out of fashion that you seldom see one now.

LOW-THROATED bodices on day dresses are already seen in Paris, and before the middle of next season they will prevail very generally.

ALPACA is having quite a revival in black and natural colours, for street and travelling gowns, and in white and light shades for evening wear.

THE Empress Eugénie declined to follow the conventional idea in beds. Hers was raised so little above the floor of her bedroom as to give, at a hasty glance, the impression that she was sleeping on the carpet.

THE twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of the Emperor Maximilian was observed recently in Vienna, where his coffin rests in the vaults of the Capucin Church, by the side of that of his ill-fated nephew, the Archduke Rudolph.

A NEW departure concerning engagement rings is stealthily gaining ground. It is this. In many instances a plain gold circle, which will subsequently be used as the wedding-ring, is first presented as the engagement-ring.

THE Grand Duke of Hesse and his youngest sister Princess Alix, who have been staying at Homburg on a visit to the Empress Frederick, are now at Schwalbach, where they have taken the Villa Greber, and they will remain there until towards the end of next month. The Grand Duke and Princess Alix are to be the guests of the Queen at Balmoral during September.

THE trailing street dress is going out as fast as it came in, several leaders of *ton* having decreed that it caused more bother than it was worth; and, better still, the sack-back jacket, first monstrosity of this season, is pronounced by the very people who sell it to be a mere joke, simply launched to see who would take it or leave it alone.

IT is not generally known that the presentation of a flag to the Sovereign, on the anniversaries of the battles of Blenheim and Waterloo, is the tenure by which the estates of Blenheim and Strathfieldsaye are held by the Dukes of Marlborough and Wellington. The flags are small silken ones, with gold fringe at the sides. They have always been made by one firm in St. James's-street, and are kept at Windsor Castle after presentation. The Duke of Marlborough's is white with three *fleur de lys* upon it, while that of the Duke of Wellington is a tricolour.

IT is claimed that the most perfect corsets in the world are manufactured in Bride-street, Dublin, at a factory which gives employment to four hundred girls. It is kept running all the time to its full capacity, and does a great export trade to London, Paris, Australia, and South Africa. The strange fact concerning the business is that the goods, after being manufactured there, must be sent to Paris to be stamped before they can be sold. They will not sell even in Dublin until they receive the Paris mark.

THE engagement of Princess Margaret of Prussia to the Prince Frederick of Hesse has caused much surprise at Court, for she was expected to make a very brilliant match, and the Duke of York, the Cesarewitch, and Prince Christian of Denmark had all been mentioned as likely to be her husband. The Princess Margaret is a clever and very sweet-tempered girl, and was the favourite child of her father, and his constant companion; and since his death she has become the constant companion of her mother, having never been absent from her for a single day. Princess Margaret is thoroughly English in all her tastes and habits; and she speaks our language without a trace of German accent, writes it perfectly, and is a great reader of English books.

STATISTICS.

ELECTRICITY, in its various applications, is said to give employment to 5,000,000 people.

IT is estimated that at the lowest computation a sum of from four to five million pounds is annually risked in bets on horse-races.

LATE statistics show that out of the 5,000,000 inhabitants in London more than 3,000,000 families earn less than three shillings a day.

THE longest sailing craft afloat is the British ship *Lancing*. She is a four-masted iron ship of 2,600 tons and 356 feet in length.

A STATISTICIAN has arrived at the conclusion that a gold coin passes from one person to another two billion times before the stamp or impression upon it becomes obliterated by friction.

THE greatest fleet of passenger vessels owned by any one company is that of the Peninsula and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. In the fleet are seventy-two steamships of 199,270 tons and 189,000 horse power. The P. and O. steamships steamed 2,500,000 miles in 1890 without an accident.

GEMS.

THOSE are the most honourable who are the most useful.

SILENCE at the proper season is wisdom, and better than any speech.

THE prudent man sees only the difficulties, the bold only the advantages of a great enterprise; the hero sees both, diminishes those, makes these predominate, and conquers.

IF you should ever find it necessary verbally to assert your social rank, do it gracefully, and do not forget you're a gentleman, in trying to prove that you're one.

SOME men are so much in love with themselves that they never see their own mistakes. They display a sort of heroism in the hopeless struggle to justify their own errors, and when their faults are made so plain to them that a confession is extorted from them, they still manage to make some capital out of their infirmity by boasting that it only proves that they are human.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

THINGS WORTH KNOWING.—Whites of eggs may be beaten to a stiff froth by an open window when it would be impossible in a steamy kitchen.

RHUBARB JELLY.—Wash and cut in small pieces, put just enough of water over it to start it to boiling; when tender drain through a coarse jelly-bag, add one cup of sugar for each cup of juice, and boil over a brisk fire for twenty minutes. It is best made late in the season.

BRIDE CAKE, THREE POUNDS WEIGHT.—This is the nearest, but will weigh more than three pounds—Half-pound butter, half pound sugar, six eggs, one pound raisins, one pound currants, quarter pound peel, one nutmeg, one dessert spoon mace and cinnamon, one wine glass milk. Beat the butter and sugar to a cream, then put in the yolks of the eggs and mix well, beat up the whites and add them time about with the flour, a little at a time, mix well, then add all the fruit nicely prepared, then the spices and the milk, give all a good beating up and bake in a slow oven two hours. Icing: Half pound icing sugar, one or two whites of eggs, half-pound ground almonds. Mix the almond and sugar together, then drop in white of egg till it is just barely moistened, spread it on the cake. It should be very dry or it will run off, and the cake must be cold. Ice this over the top with white icing made with half-pound icing sugar and white of egg mixed.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ORIENTAL husbands do not give their wives any money to use.

WOMEN are more nimble with the left hand than men. Possibly this is owing to musical training—the piano, for instance, is quite an education in left-handed nimbleness.

AN old way of interrogating fate in love affairs is to slice an apple in two with a sharp knife. If this can be done without cutting a seed, the wish of the heart will be fulfilled.

FROM an examination of the statistics contained in official marriage records, it appears that early marriages are now very much less common than in the days of our grandmothers.

IN the seventeenth century the favourite colour of the Scotch Covenanters was blue, and blue and orange or yellow became the Whig colours after the Revolution of 1688. Green is the colour of the Irish Roman Catholics, while opposed to it is the orange of the Orangemen or Protestants of the North of Ireland.

THE first glass window in this country was one put up in an abbey in the year 680. Glass windows, however, did not become general for many hundred years, and as late as 1577 the glass casements at Alnwick Castle, the Duke of Northumberland's seat, were regularly taken down when the family was away from home.

A GENTLEMAN who has been treated by skilled physicians, both in this country and abroad, says that coffee made from the green berry will bring great relief, if it does not effect a permanent cure, in the treatment of rheumatism. To a tea-cup of cold water add a tablespoonful of Java coffee. Let it stand overnight, and drink before breakfast in the morning.

A VERY simple way of preventing moths from laying their eggs in a bureau is to uncork a bottle of chloroform a few minutes in each drawer; or, better still, drop a few drops of the liquid in the drawer itself. If a garment is properly brushed and well wrapped in a newspaper moths will never go near it, as they seem to have a great dislike to the press.

WHEN a child is dying, the people in some parts of Holland are accustomed to shade it by curtains from the parents' gaze, the soul being supposed to linger in the body so long as a compassionate eye is fixed upon it. Thus, in Germany, he who sheds a tear in leaning over an expiring friend, and does not wipe it off, enhances, they consider, the difficulties of death's last struggle.

A GEOGRAPHY for blind people has been contrived which enables them to gain a tolerably correct idea of the peculiarities of the earth's surface. The maps are carved from wood or moulded in plaster, and accurately present the inequalities in the surface of the country. Mountains are of course represented by ridges in the map; oceans, rivers and lakes by perfectly smooth, glassy surfaces, while a little group of toy houses represents a city. The system is admirable, since it is really an object lesson in nature and enables these unfortunate people to gain ideas which they would never in any other way be able to acquire.

THE rapidity of animal motion is sometimes far greater than can be detected by the human eye. It is a favourite amusement of country boys, when they can find an owl sitting on a stump in a field, to walk around the bird at a considerable distance and see him "twist his head off." As the observer circles round, the creature seems to follow him by turning his head, and then gives the impression of moving his head continuously round in a circle. As a matter of fact, however, as soon as the owl's neck is twisted sufficiently for comfort, he turns his head suddenly in another direction, but so quickly that the eye cannot detect the motion.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. S. T.—Shakspeare died 1616; Samuel Johnson died 1784.

Little Boy Blue.—A murderer can be arrested anywhere if discovered.

Jim Crow.—A publican is not compelled to serve any customer.

Phil.—All dealers in silver-plate must take out a license.

Jos.—Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W.

R. A. D.—Mr. Gladstone represented Newark from 1832 to 1845.

Lallie.—Evesham is commonly pronounced as if spelt Eesham.

Strong-minded.—Women are not entitled to vote at Parliamentary elections.

An Admirer.—Hawarden Castle, Mr. Gladstone's residence, is in Flintshire.

Rosebud.—The letters "F.A.S." stand for "Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries."

Monte-Cristo.—We never recommend a bank. Why not consult someone in your own locality?

R. W. B.—There was a Parliament elected in December, 1885, and another in July, 1886.

Launcelot.—The fight at Majuba Hill, in the Transvaal, was on February 26 and 27, 1881.

G. T.—Go to your nearest coastguard or marine recruiting station at once. You have no time to lose.

Unhappy Lizzie.—There is no law to hinder persons playing at cards for money in their own houses.

Nettie.—Nothing but a divorce legalises second marriage while the first husband or wife is alive.

Wallie.—Your employer cannot be obliged to give you a "character," either verbal or written.

Spot.—The dog-licence was raised from 5s. to 7s. 6d. in 1878, during the Beaconsfield Administration.

Distress.—If the father has left the country he may be summoned within twelve months of his return.

T. K.—Such a defect would hinder you from being accepted in any police force in the Kingdom.

Approval.—The savings bank was invented by a clergyman.

Denis.—Dress-suits should not be worn before six o'clock P.M.

Middie.—All Fools' Day is traced through every country of Europe to the Hindoos.

M. T.—Mail matter is now sent from Paris to Berlin in thirty-five minutes by means of the pneumatic tube.

Lizzie.—Not knowing you we cannot possibly advise. You had better show your hair to a hairdresser, or a chemist.

Unlucky.—Do not believe what people say, or you will be like the man who, trying to please everybody, pleased nobody.

Ferdinand.—If a well could be dug to a depth of 46 miles, the air at the bottom would be as dense as quicksilver.

Cœur de Lion.—The fatal engagement with the 24th Regiment in Zululand was at Isandula, January 22, 1879

M. M.—War was declared by the French Government on 15th July, and the declaration delivered at Berlin on 19th July, 1870

Forlorn.—There are not now, we believe, any free or assisted passages for emigrants to the Australian Colonies.

Marcus.—The largest landowner in the United Kingdom is the Duke of Sutherland, who holds close upon a million of acres.

Charity.—The workhouse would not take in a child on the boarding system. A home for it must be found in a private family.

Gus.—To get the names of planters in Jamaica or one of the West India Islands you would have some difficulty unless you had a friend out there.

A Victim.—Moths and other insects do not like the scent of Russia leather, and therefore books bound with it are safe from their depredations.

A. S.—A Parliament can sit for seven years from the date of a general election. This period is fixed by the Septennial Act, which was passed in 1716.

G. H.—"The Agent-General for the Cape of Good Hope, 112, Victoria Street, S.W." will reach the proper quarter. There is no recruiting for the Cape at present.

Laurie.—Flying Childers ran four miles in six minutes and 48 seconds, declared to be the fastest time ever made by a horse in this country.

Perplexity.—If you take your George III. sovereigns and half-sovereigns to the Branch Bank of England you will be allowed their value, less loss in weight.

Rob.—The apprentice is tied to the ship to the end of the voyage, which means its return to the home port it started from, but he receives journeyman's wages at current rate from the date when his apprenticeship expires.

H. L.—You cannot compel a landlord to do internal repairs unless that was part of the agreement; and notice may be given although there is no rent in arrears.

Curiosity.—There are no statistical returns which give the numbers you require. It would be only private enterprise which would calculate the numbers so sufficient.

Sailor Laddie.—You can enter the Royal Navy from the age of 15 to 16½. The merchant service are not particular about age, provided you are not over 30, strong, and apt.

Impecunious.—There are no free passages to Canada at present. The fare is only about £4, and surely you can manage to save that before next April—the best time for arriving.

Jean.—Jane and Jean are the same, Janet comes from the same root, but is a distinct name. Jessie, again, has no connection with either, they are French, it is English.

Carl.—There is only one way, find the man who acts as "shore steward" to the line or company. He has the appointment of the sea-going stewards and assistants.

Jonas.—The phrase, "One man one vote" means that a Parliamentary voter, though qualified in more than one constituency, shall be allowed to vote in one only.

WAITING.

"Five years to wait!" Don't do it,
My innocent blue-eyed maid,
For the years may last a lifetime
While your youthful roses fade,
While your eyes are red with weeping
And watching the treacherous sea,
Till you sing the song of the lone one,
"He never came back to me."

Five years to wait, while others
Are dancing the dance of youth,
And the one perhaps you are trusting
Is breaking his vows, forsooth!
"I shall wait for my love, my darling,
Who has sailed far over the sea,
Five years, or ten, or twenty,"
Said the blue-eyed maid to me.

So she wrote her sweet love-letters,
Or tended her garden flowers,
Or watched the restless billows
On the beetling cliffs for hours;
While she turned her suitors pining
Away from the cottage door,
And waited, patiently waited,
One long, long year or more.

. . . . .

"'Tis very weary waiting,'
Said the blue-eyed maid to me,
And she glanced at her last new suitor
And then at the restless sea;
As she glanced at the roses fading
In her garden fair and bright,
Twice come, twice gone, since he left her,
Two years before that night.

And she married her last new suitor
Before the winter sped,
And she wrote to her absent lover
On the day that she was wed;
She hoped he would not suffer,
That the shock would soon be o'er,
And the answer soon informed her
He had married a year before.

Frivolous Ada.—Rustic folk in many parts of England firmly believe that in leap-year all kinds of beans are produced in the pods in the reverse position to that which is usual.

Daisy.—Soap was imperfectly known to the ancients. The first express mention of it occurs in Pliny and Galen. The former declares it to be an invention of the Gauls.

Bianca.—The slave trade of England was begun by Sir John Hawkins. His first expedition, with the object of procuring negroes on the coast of Africa, and conveying them for sale at the West Indies, took place in October, 1562.

Gipsy Queen.—The gipsy tribe is still far from extinct. The largest number exist in Turkey, which has some 200,000 of them. Then comes Austria with 197,000; Roumania, 128,000; Spain, 40,000; Germany, 42,000; Great Britain, 18,000; and Russia, 15,000.

A Martyr to Colds.—Try some spirits of camphor rubbed in the palms of the hands and then sniffed up from the hands held closely over the nose. This may be repeated as often as you please. It certainly checks the running somewhat; we do not say it is an infallible cure.

Juliet.—Examine the eye-lashes carefully one by one, trimming with a pair of scissors any which are split, feeble or crooked. Then anoint the base of the lashes every night with a minute quantity of oil of cajaput on the top of a camel-hair brush. If this is repeated sedulously for a few months, the result is most gratifying. Beautiful arched eyebrows are likewise a great detail of beauty and are not to be underrated. It is best not to trim the eyebrow, as it makes it coarse, but if it is desired to strengthen or thicken it, a few drops of cajaput oil may be safely rubbed into the skin every other night.

Mabel.—It is difficult to prescribe for nervousness without knowing the cause of it in each individual case. The mode of living, the condition of the stomach, and the mental state of the sufferer have all to be considered. Exercise in the open air, regular habits, and cheerful company will sometimes afford relief without the aid of nervines.

Old Maid.—Yellow hairs, however few in number, always indicate the female; no male ever has the slightest tint of yellow. A blue-eyed cat is always deaf. To be sure, blue-eyed cats are scarce, and it is possible that some deaf cats may not be blue-eyed, but wherever you find a blue-eyed cat that feline is absolutely incapable of hearing thunder.

Tom's Darling.—The head-waiters at some of the larger hotels get £30 a-year, and calculate on making up their income to £1 a day through tips. At several houses the under-waiters have to pay £10 a-year for their position, but manage to clear over £60 a-year even then. The usual salary for a *chef* at first-class hotels is £400 a-year and the use of a piano!

Industry.—Silver or plated thimbles are very much the best and safest, and when these are too expensive a good substitute can be found in a highly-burnished steel thimble. For practicable everyday use, this latter kind is the most convenient, but pewter or lead should never be used, especially by people whose flesh is slow to heal after a scratch or cut.

P. S. D.—The Holy Rose to which you refer fell this year, it is announced, to the Queen of Portugal. It is bestowed by the Pope every year upon some Roman Catholic princess "for virtue." The stem of the rose is of solid gold; the cup of the flower is set with rare precious stones, and the leaves are similarly set with small gems. It is a popular impression that the family of the possessor of the Holy Rose will never die out.

Hypatia.—You are not competent to judge accurately what course your *fiancé* will take in any business contingency, unless you have sufficient power over him to control his actions altogether. Not one woman in a thousand is a good judge of the influence which business necessities exercise upon men, because few women do understand business necessities, or their effect upon the actions of men, even when the men are lovers.

Butterfly.—The Tuileries, Paris, the imperial palace of France, was commenced by Catharine de Medicis, after the plans of Philibert de l'Orme. Date 1564. It was continued by Henry IV., and finished by Louis XIV. It was stormed by the mob, August 10, 1792, and ransacked in the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. In 1871 it was destroyed by fire by the Communists, and its attractive gardens were much injured, but they have since been restored to their former beauty.

Flora.—Flowers can be preserved in their natural form and colour by inserting their stems in water in which twenty-five grains of ammonia chloride have been dissolved. They can be preserved in this way from fifteen to thirty days. To preserve them permanently, dip them, bloom and all, into perfectly limpid gum water, and then allow them to drain. The gum forms a complete coating on the stems and petals, and preserves their form and colour long after they have become dry.

Mamie.—The precise date of Jenny Lind's death was November 2, 1887; she died at her own home at Malvern; her last public appearance was at a concert given for the benefit of railway servants' benevolent fund, at Spa, Malvern, on July 23, 1883; and the last notes that she sang were the first few bars of Schumann's song, "An den Sonnenschein," which she murmured on her death-bed when her daughter opened the window to let in a ray of morning light.

Dick.—The largest plant is a tree—the *Adansonia digitata*. The smallest one is invisible on account of its extreme diminutiveness, and consequently has not been named or classified. The *A. digitata*, called also the baobab and monkey bread, is a native of the tropical parts of western and southern Africa. It is the largest known tree, not indeed rising to a very great height, but exceeding all others in the thickness of its trunk (twenty to thirty feet). Even its branches, seventy feet long, are often as thick as the stems of large trees, and they form a hemispherical head of 150 feet in diameter.

Carlo.—Ten times the length the hand, or seven and a half times the length of the foot, or five times the diameter of the chest from one arm-pit to the other, should also give the height of the whole body. The distance from the junction of the thighs to the ground should be exactly the same as from that point to the crown of the head. The knee should be perfectly midway between the first-named point and the ground at the heel. The distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger should be the same as from the elbow to the middle of the breast.

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